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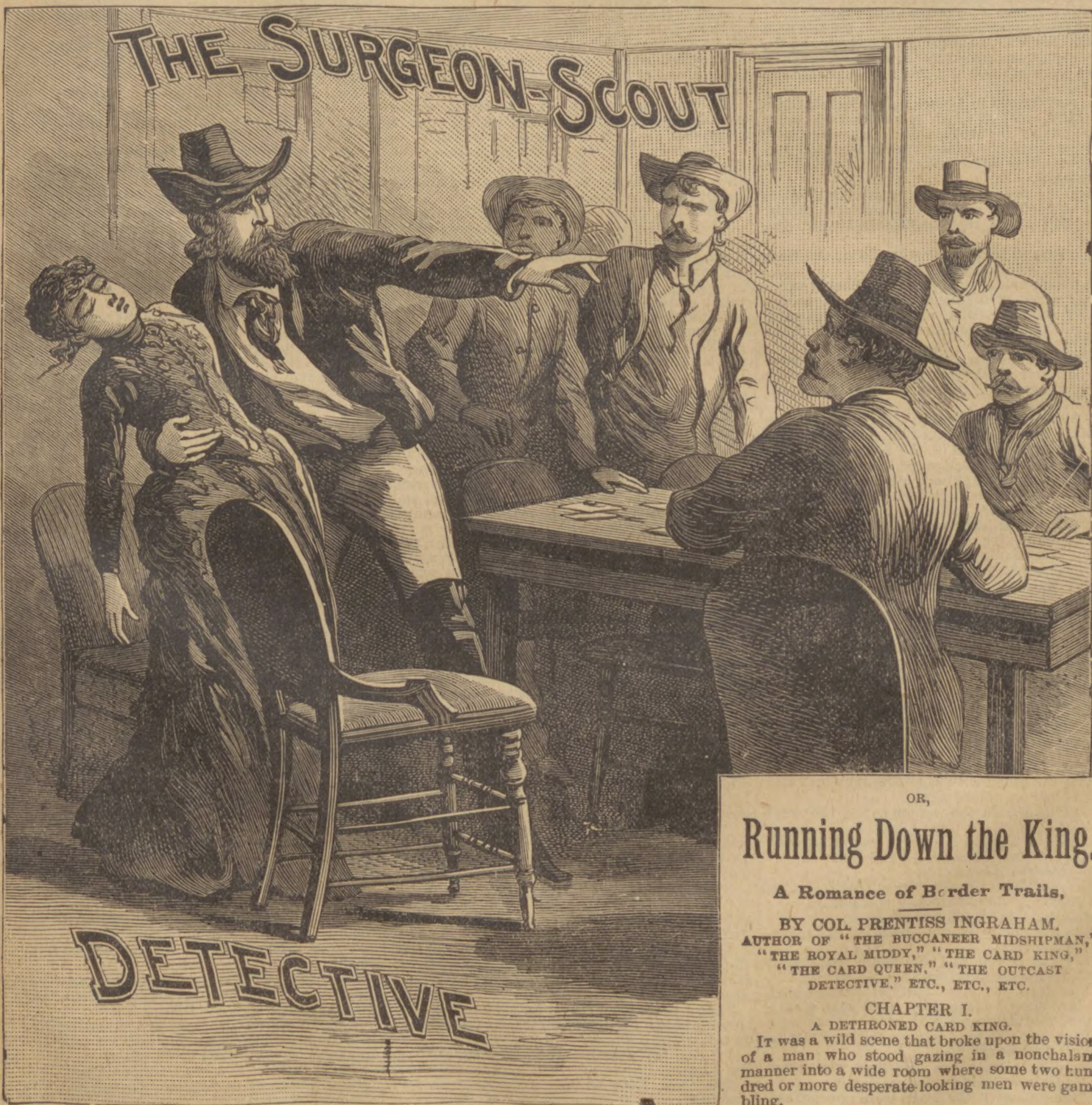
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OR,

Running Down the King.

A Romance of Border Trails.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.
AUTHOR OF "THE BUCCANEER MIDSHIPMAN,"
"THE ROYAL MIDDY," "THE CARD KING,"
"THE CARD QUEEN," "THE OUTCAST
DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A DETHRONED CARD KING.

It was a wild scene that broke upon the vision of a man who stood gazing in a nonchalant manner into a wide room where some two hundred or more desperate-looking men were gambling.

The structure was of logs and plank, a dirt floor, rude chairs and tables scattered about.

"I'LL HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY TO YOU, SOON, BART BRADLEY YOU'LL PLAY FOR A BIGGER GAME THAN MONEY, THEN."

with a bar at one end of the room and behind the latter three men kept busy supplying a wild crowd with liquors and cigars.

The tables were surrounded by gamblers, and upon them were gold and silver, little heaps of yellow metal and small bags of precious dust, the stakes for which the men were playing, risking days of toil upon the turn of a card.

It was in the mines of the frontier, a camp known as Sunset City, and the Good Luck Hall, as the place was known, was the most popular resort in that part of the country.

Those gathered there were rough-looking, bearded fellows, many of them with evil faces, others with honest ones, and scores too who were out and out desperadoes.

The miner's costume, of dark pants, woolen shirts, top-boots and slouch hats prevailed, with the ever-present belt of arms; but there were others who were better dressed, and a few who wore buckskin.

The man who stood gazing upon the scene seemed to be not one of the crowd, so different he appeared.

He was tall, broad-shouldered, an athlete in form, and with a face that would command admiration anywhere.

It was the face of a man reared in refinement, and his manners were courtly and suave.

But the handsome face wore the impress of a strong character, be it for good or bad, and the eyes seemed to penetrate to one's very soul in anger, yet were soft as a deer's in expression in repose.

He was dressed in a black velvet jacket, white silk shirt, with a black scarf knotted sailor fashion under the broad collar, and wore a pair of white corduroy pants stuck in high-top cavalry boots, the latter being shapely and of the finest make.

Upon his head was a black sombrero, the flap being turned up on the left side and caught there with a pin representing the king of diamonds.

His hair and beard were worn long, and were silken and well-cared for.

About his waist was a belt with a buckle representing a king of diamonds in gold and enamel, and though not visible under his velvet sack-coat, all knew that there were weapons ready for the grasp.

Quietly smoking a cigar, he stood in the doorway of Good Luck Hall, gazing upon the noisy and exciting scene, while a strange look rested upon his face.

As though he had decided upon his course, he suddenly walked across the hall, and took a seat at a table near one end of the bar, seating himself so that no one could stand behind him.

A number of men at once moved toward him, and one young man, a perfect giant in size and with a reckless face, called out:

"Say, my fine-feathered Card King, I am in luck to-night, for I have won at every table where I have played, and I am willing to try you for any sum you name."

"All right, Bart Bradley; you know I am always ready to play any one, and for any sum," was the cool reply of the man who had been addressed as the Card King.

"Well, I've struck it rich of late in my diggings, and to-night I've won a pile of dust, so name your price."

"Begin at a hundred, then, Card King."

The answer was to place that sum upon the table, and the game was begun, all the miners about the table watching with the greatest interest the two men, between whom they knew there was no love lost.

The game ended with Bart Bradley's luck still clinging to him, for he won.

"Call it double the amount for the next game," suggested the Card King.

"All right, Donald King," answered Bradley and another game was played and lost.

The Gambler King lost it.

"Five hundred, Bradley," he said with a smile.

"Certainly," and the money was put up.

Again the Card King was the loser.

"One thousand," he said without the movement of a muscle.

The miner bowed, and the game was played through with the same result.

"You have not your Lady of Fortune with you, Don King," whispered a stout man with a red face who had watched the game attentively.

"True, but I'll try my luck without her for awhile," was the answer.

Then double the stake as before was named and the Gambler King as before lost it.

All the miners in the room were now gathering about the players.

Their own game was forgotten in the interest felt about these two.

Bart Bradley was a young miner who was given to wild freaks and desperate deeds at times, and he was generally feared in the mines, no one caring to have any trouble with him.

The gambler had come to Sunset City camps some time before, and at once won fame as a bold man, and most expert card-player. Such an expert player, indeed, was he that he was rarely a loser.

Some said that he played an unfair game, but one or two who had been bold enough to make the accusation against him, had died, suddenly, "with their boots on."

Some said, too, that his luck was owing to the fact that he had brought his wife with him as a Lady of Fortune, as they called her, and that she was the one to thank for his winnings.

She had been often told by her husband, when luck was not wholly in his way, to play for him, and she never lost.

So it was that Landlord English, the large, red-faced man, had spoken to the Gambler King and suggested that his Lady of Fortune was not present, and that was why he lost.

English was so called because he was an Englishman, for if he had another name he did not make it known.

He was the proprietor of the gambling saloon of Good Luck Hall, and also of the Pilgrim's Roost, the tony hotel of the mining-camps, and as the Card King was his best patron he was not desirous of seeing him lose any large sum of money.

As the game progressed, Donald King the gambler still lost, and Landlord English again urged that the Lady of Fortune be called.

"Please call my wife," suddenly requested the Card King, for the first time showing annoyance at his losses, as Bart Bradley laughed lightly and asked:

"Are you afraid to double again, Don King?"

"It is a word I do not know the meaning of, sir, the word *afraid*," was the answer, and then it was that he asked English to call his wife.

English hastened out of Good Luck Hall, and in a short while returned accompanied by a young and beautiful woman.

As they entered they heard the words:

"Don King has lost his grip on luck."

"Yes, the Gambler King has been dethroned," was the reply.

CHAPTER II.

THE LADY OF FORTUNE.

THE one who entered in company with the landlord of the Good Luck Hall, was certainly a strange person to be seen in that frontier camp, for she was elegantly dressed; her ears, neck and hands sprinkled with diamonds, and her face was full of refinement and beauty, though touchingly sad.

She evidently was not out of her teens, and yet there was a womanly look about her, a sadness that haunted her beautiful eyes which caused her to appear older.

She swept into the wretched place like a queen and at her appearance marked respect was shown by the rough men present.

She smiled upon those who saluted her, and went straight up to the chair of her husband, laying her hand upon his shoulder just as he had lost for the thirteenth time that evening.

"You wished me, Donald?" she said in a low, musical voice.

"Yes, I have lost steadily and wished you to take take my hand."

"I object!" gruffly protested Bart Bradley, who feared that Fortune would desert him if he had to play against the Queen of Diamonds, as she was called.

"I have the right, sir, to give my place to my wife, and no one has dared dispute it," said Donald King, turning his piercing eyes, upon the miner.

"That's so, Bart," the landlord assured.

"Yes, pard, let her play," cried a voice, and others taking it up the miner saw that he must yield.

The truth was the miner was surprised at the ill-fortune of the Card King and wished to see if it was going to follow the Queen of Diamonds also.

They wished her to play, for they were superstitious about her luck, and here was a chance to test it.

"I give in!" assented Bart Bradley, in a sulken manner.

The Card King at once arose from his seat and the Queen of Diamonds took his place.

She picked up the cards, shuffled and dealt them with a skill that all admired, and then asked:

"What was the last stake, Mr. Bradley?"

"Five thousand, for we've been doubling and playing big."

"Then double that," she remarked, with perfect composure.

"I can afford it if you can, Diamond Queen," was the reply.

The money was staked and the game began.

The woman played with great skill, and with perfect self-possession.

"You've lost your grip too, Diamond Queen," said Bart Bradley, as he won.

She made no reply, and her face was perfectly composed; but the color faded from it.

A surprised murmur went through the room. Never before had the Queen of Diamonds been known to lose!

Did her husband, the Card King, have bad luck for a few games, when she took his hand in a game, luck was sure to follow her.

The miners were amazed, and all eyes turned upon the Diamond Queen, Bart Bradley, and then upon Don King, the gambler.

The latter was unmoved apparently, and yet his face had whitened.

He had an abiding faith in his beautiful wife, and she had just lost a large—a very large stake.

The game must go on, and another large risk must be taken.

"Do you play again, sir?" coolly asked the Lady of Fortune, as she turned her beautiful eyes upon the miner.

Bart Bradley was in great glee. He had won steadily, he had dethroned the mighty Card King, and he had won from the Lady of Fortune!

Never before had he had so much money, and he became reckless; so he answered the question of the Diamond Queen:

"Oh, yes; I'll meet any sum you name."

"Suppose it be for all you have won to-night, then?"

"You can stand it?" he asked, glancing a trifle uneasily into the face of the woman.

"Ah, yes," and though her words and manner were indifferent, she cast a hasty glance up at the Card King.

He gave her a glance which she seemed to understand, and she took up the cards, while the Card King placed the amount of the stakes upon the table.

"I have won again," almost shouted the young miner, clutching at his gold, while the Diamond Queen sat wholly unmoved before him.

"Shall we play again?" asked the woman, after another quick glance at her husband.

"Oh, you are grit, my lady, and no mistake; but I am no one to back out, so I say let her go again," said Bradley, becoming excited over his wonderful run of luck.

The Diamond Queen's face was now white as that of a corpse, and the Card King seemed for the once disturbed and anxious; but the woman said composedly:

"Name your stake, sir?"

"I leave that for you to do, Lady of Fortune."

"Then, as before, all your winnings."

"I'll do it, and chip in five thousand more for luck, if you say so!"

Again a quick glance at her husband, and from between his shut teeth came the words in a hissing tone, and which reached only her ears:

"We cannot lose again!"

"As you will, sir!" she said, with a quiet smile, and the stakes were put up.

Then the game was played amid breathless silence.

When the last card was turned down, Bradley gave a wild yell of delight. He had again won!

"Curse you!" broke from the lips of the Card King.

But the words were not addressed to the miner; they were hissed into the ears of his wife!

She gave a low moan and fell forward upon the table, in a deep swoon.

Seizing her in his strong arms, the Card King cried:

"I'll have something to say to you, Bart Bradley. You'll play for a bigger game than money, then."

With this he strode from the room, bearing his wife in his arms and followed by Landlord English.

To her room he took the Diamond Queen, and there left her, all unconscious though she was, while he returned to the Good Luck Hall, and walking boldly up to the table where the miner still sat, he said in a sharp voice:

"Bart Bradley, you are a card thief!"

CHAPTER III.

LIFE THE STAKES.

THOUGH the Card King uttered the words against Bradley, it was evident that he did not believe them himself.

He had carefully watched the game between his wife and the miner, in spite of his seeming indifference, and he knew that the miner simply had struck a remarkable run of good-luck.

He was angry that the Diamond Queen had lost her grip, so to speak, upon fortune.

He was furious with himself that the young miner had dethroned him as Card King, and he could see but one way to regain his prestige.

That way was a deadly one.

It meant that Bart Bradley was to try another game with him, one of life and death.

So it was that he had left his beautiful wife in a faint in her room, and had returned to the gambling hall to square matters with the miner.

Uttering the words, he at once held up his hands as Bart Bradley dropped his upon his revolver at the insult.

"You dare to call me a cheat at cards, Don King?" cried the young miner.

Up went the hands of the Card King over his head, while he said:

"Hold! Do not fire here in this crowd, for the innocent would suffer, and we can settle this matter in a regular way," he said.

"You called me a thief, and you shall answer for it."

"That I am willing to do, and I back up my words with my life."

"Then draw and defend yourself."

"Not so fast, for we can fight a duel, and that will settle it."

"I am ready, so it is settled."

"Well, I watched your game to-night very closely, and I say, with my life at stake, that you cheated."

"And I say you lie, Don King!"

"I am willing to risk my life on my words; and more—I am going to make you play a square game for your life."

"Go ahead."

"Gentlemen!" and the Card King glanced over the crowd, and voices answered:

"Shout, pard! shout!"

"I wish to play cards with this man, the best two games in three. I wish the stakes to be to-night's winnings, and a loaded revolver upon the table."

"I play for the money and for life, the loser to give up his gold, take his stand ten paces in front of the winner, and meet his fate like a man."

A murmur ran around the room at this bold proposition.

"Do you mean, Don King, that the loser is not to be armed—to fire no shot?" asked Bart Bradley.

"I do."

"But is to lose his gold and stand up to be shot at?"

"Yes."

"How many shots?"

"One; for if I win, there will be but one shot needed," was the grim response.

"Well, I am no coward, Don King, and I agree to part of your challenge."

"And why not all?"

"Well, I have been a wild fellow in my time, and I left my home owing those who had befriended me."

"I have the money here now to send back and pay every dollar I owe with interest, and I can then dig out a pretty good sum for myself, that I may return in honor and have something to live upon as I grow old."

"So the money I will not put up, for that is not mine, as I put it, and, in case I die, I have papers here to tell how it is all to go."

"But my life I will stake, and we will begin the game whenever you wish."

A dread silence followed the words of the young miner, and all eyes were turned upon the face of the Gambler King.

"You refuse to stake the money, do you?"

"Yes, I do."

"You value it more than you do your life?"

"Under the circumstances, yes."

"And you will play with me with death as the stake?"

"Certainly."

The gambler was chagrined, but he dared not show it.

It was hardly enough to fight for a life alone, and he felt that he was almost sorry for his proposition.

But that was no crowd to back out in, and he determined to stand by his words.

So he said:

"Very well, Bradley, do as you please with

your winnings, which you cheated to get, and make the stake your life or mine."

The miner smiled in an indifferent way, and rejoined:

"All right; I'll make make my will, and I advise you to do the same."

He called to the bartender to bring him pen, ink and paper, and sitting down to the table wrote a few lines rapidly.

Then calling upon Landlord English and several others present, he said:

"Pards, I leave this paper in your hands, and my money, too, for you to see that it is paid out as I direct. You will find in my pocket other papers, so you will know just what to do if I go under, and I feel that I can trust you."

"Now, Don King, let a revolver be placed, loaded, upon the table, and we will call it the stake to be played for. I am ready for the game."

He spoke with the utmost coolness, and it annoyed the Diamond King, without doubt, to see that he could do so; but placing his revolver upon the table, he said:

"I, too, am ready."

Not a sound was heard as the two men took their seats at the table, and a few noticed that Donald King took the chair formerly occupied by the miner.

It was the superstition that all gamblers have, in a more or less degree, that caused him to do this.

"It will change my luck," he mused to himself as he took the chair and picked up the cards.

CHAPTER IV.

CLAIMING HIS STAKES.

THE miner turned slightly pale as the gambler slipped into his seat.

He, too, was superstitious, and yet he could do nothing to prevent the act.

He sat down himself then in the chair of the Gambler King, and said in a low tone:

"Let us begin."

Don King bowed and they cut for a deal.

The gambler shuffled the cards well and dealt, and the game began.

Each man played with great calmness, and the game ended with the Card King winner.

All breathed in a suppressed way.

Had the wonderful luck of the miner deserted him?

Would the Card King regain his prestige?

Again the game was begun, and was slowly played to the end, and a suppressed murmur ran through the crowd as Bart Bradley won.

"A game for each of us," said the Card King, with a smile.

"Yes, the next will tell," answered the miner.

"True, one of us two has but a few moments to live."

These words fell like a pall upon all present.

Silence.

There was not a word other than the suppressed breathing of the lookers on.

The men present were accustomed to wild scenes, and they lived in excitement, enjoying the danger one and all of them had to face each day of their lives.

But this was a scene above the common.

The Card King was a dangerous man, feared by all in the camps.

Nearly every man there had lost by playing with him, and his luck, with that of the Diamond Queen was phenomenal.

There had come a change, and both the gambler and his wife had lost, and now the stake was for a life, the life of one of the two men who sat at the table, calm and determined.

Two games had been played and one stood to the credit of each player.

Thus it was that the suspense, during the deciding game hung like a pall over all.

The men played slowly; they seemed oblivious to anything except the cards before them.

These were laid down as though drawn from their very hearts.

At last the game ended and Bart Bradley turned to the hue of death.

But he did not move, nor did his face show, other than by its paleness that he felt the doom before him.

"You have lost, sir," said the Card King, and his voice was taunting, but it was a relief to have the dread silence broken.

"I have," and the voice of the miner was firm.

"And I have won."

"You have."

"You remember the stake that we played for?" and the Card King seemed to enjoy the misery he could not but heap upon his foe.

"I remember."

"The stake was your life, or mine?"

"Yes, and you have won."

"Yes, the stake was your life or mine, and you have lost, so I claim payment in full, Bart Bradley," and the Card King took up the revolver that lay upon the table.

As he took up the pistol, the gambler quietly glanced at it and then rose from the table.

Not a sound had yet come from the crowd in the hall, but all eyes were upon the two men.

"Gentlemen, you remember the stakes we played for?" and the Card King glanced over the faces about him.

"We remember."

A dozen voices perhaps uttered the words in chorus, but the remainder of those present were silent.

"Are you ready to pay your stake, Bart Bradley?" asked the Gambler King calmly.

With equal calmness the loser replied:

"I always pay when I lose."

"It will be your last payment."

"I played with my eyes open to all risks, Don King."

There was no tremor in the voice, and the man seemed to have resigned himself to his fate; but yet there was about him a look of lingering hope that he would not be called upon to pay the deadly debt he had played for.

The same feeling seemed to pervade the thoughts of all present, and the eyes of the crowd were roving between the two men who stood before them in such a strange situation.

The gambler's face did not reveal what he felt, or what he intended to do.

Just as the silence was growing intensely oppressive, he said:

"Bart Bradley, have you settled up your affairs with this world?"

"I have."

"Then take your stand over yonder by the window."

The miner rose from his seat, and with a firm step walked toward the designated spot.

As he passed along the crowd gave way to him, and he smiled a farewell here and there to intimate friends.

Leaving his stand by the table the Gambler King walked over by the door leading into the hotel and took his position across the hall from the miner.

He seemed to wish to show his skill with a revolver by killing his man at a long distance.

The crowd swayed away to either side, and the miner stood with upright form facing his executioner.

His hands hung down by his side, his face was turned full upon the gambler, and though pale, was fearless.

"Say your prayers, Bart Bradley, for life was the stake we played for; you lost, I won, and I will kill you," said the Card King sternly.

The crowd drew a long breath, as one man.

Was it not bluster on the gambler's part to frighten the miner? Would he fire after all?

While these thoughts flashed through the minds of those present, the Card King slowly raised the weapon to a level.

An instant of fearful suspense, and then came the crack of the revolver and Bart Bradley sunk in his tracks upon the floor.

There were loud exclamations, oaths, stern voices, the bang of a door, and when the smoke drifted away the Gambler King was gone.

But the miner lay where he had fallen, a bullet in his broad breast.

CHAPTER V.

DESERTED.

THE devil in the nature of the Gambler King had caused him to fire upon the miner. His heart was embittered, his brain in a whirl.

The miner had robbed him of his claim to the title of Card King, and he was determined that no other should wear it.

Then his wife, the Lady of Fortune, who had never lost before, suddenly found luck against her.

All these things put together made Don King merciless, and so he had taken deliberate aim to kill Bart Bradley.

Hardly had the shot been made when he realized his mistake. He knew that the miners, desperate as they were, might vent their rage upon him.

Hence it was that he had slipped out of the door, and hastened to his room in the hotel.

He found his wife, whom he had left in a swoon, lying upon the bed. She had recovered consciousness, but looked pale and haggard.

"Oh, my husband, I am so glad you have come, for I am ill, and so wretched," she murmured, in a low voice.

"Yes, I have come, but I shall not remain long, for I fear I may get into trouble, Isabel."

"Ah, always trouble! But you look so stern, so angry, King?"

"I have cause, for did you not lose your luck?"

"I could not help it, King."

"Bah! You are no earthly use now, for your charm has gone, and you no longer are the Lady of Fortune."

"Thank Heaven for that! But, what has happened? Pray tell me, for this suspense is awful."

"I killed Bart Bradley."

"Poor fellow!"

"You feel sympathy for him, do you? Why, he won from me nearly every dollar I have, and then I made the stake his life or mine, and I was the winner," the gambler said, with a bitter laugh.

"And you did not spare him?"

"Not I!"

"Ah, King, I fear the miners will hang you."

"So fear I, and for that reason I shall leave the camps for a few days."

"I am unable to go, King, for I am really ill."

"I did not ask you to go. I will go alone."

"King, would you desert me?"

"Don't be a fool, for I shall only be gone until this affair blows over, and will write you by the stage-coach. Give me the money you have laid aside."

"It is in my desk yonder."

He walked toward the desk, took out a bag of gold and some bank-notes, after which he turned to leave the room.

"Will you not kiss me good-by, King, even if it is but for a few days?" she said in a low, quivering voice.

"Good-by!" was his gruff reply, and he strode from the room, leaving the young and beautiful wife alone in her sorrow and suffering.

An hour after there came a loud knock upon her door.

It was Landlord English, and as he entered, he cried excitedly:

"King, you must fly for your life, for the boys have drunk themselves into a frenzy and intend to hang you."

Isabel gave a startled cry, but told the landlord that her husband had already gone, and the stable-boy confirmed the fact, so that the men were thwarted in their very plausible intention.

The night passed away in a wild debauch, and loud oaths of vengeance against the Card King reached the ears of the poor wife, as she lay upon the bed of suffering, and they were also heard by Bart Bradley, who lay groaning in his room, hanging between life and death.

The morning dawned to find the gambler far beyond the reach of his foes, and the next day the stage-driver brought a letter for Isabel.

It had been handed to him by the gambler himself, whom he had met on the Overland Trail.

Isabel had seized it eagerly and read as follows:

"IN THE MOUNTAINS.
Tuesday."

"ISABEL:—

"Do not go into hysterics, but take matters coolly, so as not to worry yourself sick about what I tell you."

"As you have lost your luck, you are no longer of use to me, so I shall never return to you, and I advise you to return to your friends in the East, where you may perhaps be able to find out some trace of the fortune your miner father left you."

"I shall go my way, so bid you farewell forever, wishing you happiness, once you have gotten me out of your heart, for I must give you the credit of having been a devoted wife to me."

"Yours,

"KENT KINGDON, alias

"Donald King,

"The Card King."

A shriek ran through the hotel as the poor deserted woman read this cruel, heartless letter, and when Landlord English and a female servant reached the room they found Isabel lying upon the floor, her dress stained crimson from a hemorrhage of the lungs.

Tenderly she was taken up and placed in bed, while a miner came softly up to the door to report the arrival of an army surgeon, who, with a squadron of cavalry, was on a trip through the mountains.

English at once hastened down to the office and found there an officer in the uniform of a cavalry surgeon.

He was a splendid looking man, with a stern but kindly face, and one that was strongly stamped with nobleness and courage.

"Are you a surgeon, sir?" asked the landlord.

"Yes, sir, and at your service, while I ask

shelter for myself and men until the morrow.

"My name is Frank Powell and I am a surgeon at the fort north of here."

"Frank Powell? Ah! but your name is well known, sir, if you are he whom men call the Surgeon Scout?"

"I am he, sir," was the reply with a smile.

"They say you are as fine a scout as you are a surgeon, and the Indians call you White Beaver?"

"Yes, I have plenty of border names, sir; but can you accommodate us?"

"Certainly, sir, and you shall have the best; but now I must ask you to see a lady guest who has just had a severe hemorrhage of the lungs, and I fear will die."

"At once, sir; you should have spoken sooner," and Surgeon Powell hastened away with Landlord English to see poor Isabel the Deserted Wife.

CHAPTER VI.

NO HOPE.

"WELL, Surgeon Powell, will she die?"

So asked Landlord English as the army surgeon came from the room of poor Isabel, the woman who had reigned but a short while before as the beautiful Queen of Diamonds.

The surgeon's fine face looked serious.

He had evidently been impressed by his visit to the strange woman.

She is in no immediate danger, sir; but her health is shattered, and I would say that she is dying of a broken heart."

"That's it, surgeon; she has broken her heart for a man who cared nothing for her, beautiful as she is; but I am glad that you say she will get well."

"I did not say so, landlord, for I do not believe that she will; but, she is in no immediate danger. Who is she?"

"We call her here the Diamond Queen and the Lady of Fortune; but no one knows more of her than they do of her mysterious husband. They came here some time ago, and he is known as the Card King, and the Diamond King, though I believe his real name is Donald King. The lady he forced to play, and she never lost," and the landlord went on to tell all that he knew of the lovely woman and her wicked husband.

The surgeon seemed deeply interested, and asked:

"Is her husband a fugitive now?"

"Yes, and I think has deserted her, for the Overland driver brought her a letter from him to-day, and it was this that brought on that hemorrhage."

"Did you see the letter?"

"No, she clung to it too closely for that."

"Well, I gave her medicine and will see her again to-night, and to-morrow. Heaven knows I will do all I can for her," and the kind-hearted surgeon walked off to look to the comfort of his men.

The next day, before he departed on his way to the fort, he sought the room of Isabel, and said:

"I heard you say last night that you wished to die?"

"Yes."

"Did you mean it?"

"I did."

"Has life been so cruel to you that you wish to leave it?"

"Yes, I will be glad to die."

"Ah, one of your age should not feel so."

"I have nothing to live for, and I am content to go. Will I not die soon?"

"I wished to tell you that you are a very sick woman."

"I am glad."

"It pains me to hear you talk so; but I wished you to know the truth, so that you might prepare against death."

"I thank you, sir; but I have few preparations to make."

Surgeon Powell was not the man to pry into the secret life of the woman. He knew there was a mystery about her, and that her life had been a strange and sad one.

She was not what he had expected to find her, as the wife of a gambler of the mines. He saw that she was a lady, and had been reared in refinement; but here he found her, dying in a frontier mining-camp, and deserted by the man for whom she had sacrificed her life.

He bade her farewell, saying nothing about not seeing her again, and leaving with the kind-hearted landlord medicines for her to take.

The Surgeon Scout had not been very long gone from the camps, attended by his escort of soldiers, when two horsemen rode up to the hotel.

One was a man of middle age, and presented the appearance of a person who had long dwelt upon the border.

The other was a youth, with a face that was stamped with fearlessness, wore a look of strange determination for one so young, and withal was strangely handsome.

His form was slight, but sinewy and graceful, and he was one to attract attention anywhere by his jaunty air, and striking face.

Both were well-mounted and armed, the elder leading a pack-horse bearing a heavy pack, and the landlord who saw them ride up to the door wondered what could be the link that bound the two together, for the youth seemed out of place with his rough companion.

"We wish quarters, sir, if you can accommodate us," the young man said politely.

"I can, young sir, for that is how I make my bread, entertaining guests."

"Will you stop long, or are you on the trail?"

"We are on the trail, sir, I may say, for I am anxious to find a man known as she Card King."

"You are just a day or two late for he has gone."

"Gone!" and the youth started.

"Yes, he left in a hurry night before last."

"And his wife?" was the quick reply.

"His poor wife is here, and I guess she's likely to stay until we take her up on the hill yonder to her grave."

"Ah, I am sorry," and the face of the young man flushed and paled by turns.

"She is ill then?"

"Yes, very ill, for she had bleeding from the lungs, and I guess she's stamped with consumption, for she told me her father died that way."

"Do you know her?"

"Yes, oh yes, and I came from her friends, in fact she is a relative of mine, so I would like to see her."

"I will go and tell her you are here."

"What is your name, young pard?"

"Kent King."

"The gambler was named Donald King."

"Yes, yes, I know; but perhaps you had better let me seek Mrs. King alone, as telling her I am here might shock her, you know."

It did not occur to Landlord English that the entrance of the youth into the presence of the sick woman might be a greater shock than to be told that there was one of her kinsmen there to see her, so he said:

"All right, her room is at the end of that hall. Is there any one with her?"

"Not now, for the girl who cares for her is sleeping now, for she sits up at night."

"Thank you," and turning to his comrade, who just then came out of the bar, he told him to make himself comfortable, while he sought the room of the Diamond Queen.

Reaching the door he tapped lightly and a faint voice within replied:

"Come in."

Softly he opened the door and stepped within the room, a look of surprise crossing his face at the appearance of almost luxury that met his view in that far-away place.

Then his eyes became riveted upon the woman who lay, with white, haggard face before him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHADOWER.

ISABEL gazed with surprise as her eyes fell upon the stranger who entered her room, for he was so different from the rough men whom she was accustomed to seeing.

But the intruder allowed her no time for conjecture regarding him, but walked quickly toward the bed and said:

"You are the Diamond Queen, and you are ill and in sorrow?"

The voice and words were so sympathetic, the look so kind, that they went at once to the heart of the poor deserted wife.

"Yes, I am very sick, and the army surgeon who is staying here at the hotel says I will not live, and my sorrows are so heavy that I will be glad to die."

The eyes of the youth became dim at her words, and he said:

"I hope it is not so bad as that, for you are young and very beautiful."

"Would to Heaven I had been hideous in face and form."

"Beauty is a curse to many."

"Do not worry yourself, for you are not alone; but let me tell you that I am here to care for you."

"You! did he send you?"

"Who?"

"My husband."

"The Card King?"

"Yes."

"No, he did not."

"Who sent you?"

"I came of my own free will."

"Who are you?"

The youth did not reply at once, but seemed lost in deep thought.

At last Isabel asked again:

"Who are you, sir?"

"I will tell you a secret."

"A secret?"

"Yes, if you will keep it."

"I will not betray you," she answered with a sigh. "I am a woman."

"You a woman!" and the eyes of the dying Card Queen were fixed upon the face of her visitor.

"Yes, I am a woman, and I assumed this disguise for a purpose."

"I cannot understand it."

"Well, feel that, as a woman, I can serve you, be your friend, and that you shall know all in good time."

"I will, and I am so glad that you have come to me."

"And so I am also; but you must not betray my sex, and I will say that I am your brother, and get the room next to you."

"And are you, thus disguised, alone in this awful country?"

"I have a companion with me, a man whom I hired for a purpose."

"He knows me as I am; but tell me, where is your husband?"

"He has deserted me."

"Answer me frankly a few questions."

"I will."

"You are his wife?"

"Yes, we were married by a minister who was in a mining-camp where we then were."

"If you wish I will be glad to tell you my sad story, for you are so good, so beautiful, and now I can readily see that you must be a woman."

"Then, too, I must tell some one, and intended to speak to the kind army surgeon when next he visited me."

"He has gone, the landlord said, for he had to go on to the fort; but I will care for you."

"You are so good, and I will tell you all, for it would relieve my heart of the load upon it, and then, too, I have much that I wish to have done before I die."

"Do not speak of dying."

"I must, for I know that I cannot live long, so I must not delay in telling you what I would; but go and see about getting the room next to me, and also get your dinner and rest, for you look tired."

The disguised woman left the room and in an hour returned.

"I told the landlord that you were my sister, and I have the room near you."

"Now I am to be your nurse, remember, and you must make use of me."

"Let me first tell you my story, for I might die if another hemorrhage came on."

"As you think best; but speak low and do not worry."

"I will not worry, for I have gotten beyond that now," was the sad reply.

After a moment Isabel said:

"My name is Isabel Drew, and what home I have known is in New York State."

"My mother died when I was quite young, and my father being unfortunate in business came to the gold mines in the West."

"I made my home with a cousin of my father, and was sent to boarding-school."

"When I graduated I at once decided to come West to see my father, who had prospered, but yet I felt that he was ill and needed me."

"I came alone, and on the Overland Trail met a young man in the stage-coach who fairly fascinated me."

"He was almost foppishly-dressed, and yet, when attacked by road-agents we escaped through his courage."

"The driver was killed and he drove the stage on to the mining-camp, and I told him why I had come West."

"He began a search for my father, and found him, but, alas! he was dying."

"To the guardianship of this new-found friend my father left me, and, to make a long story short, I loved him and was content."

"We went together to my father's cabin, and I saw how he had buried him, and, in fact he had been so good to me that I could not help marrying him."

"Afterward I found out that he was a bad

man, in fact was known as the Card King, and his hands were dyed with the blood of many of his fellow-men."

"But I clung to him, and obeying him, began myself to gamble, for I had phenomenal luck."

"He has treated me cruelly, and he broke my heart; but two nights ago he sent for me to take his hand in a desperate game he was playing."

"He had lost heavily, and depended upon my luck."

"Alas! my luck had deserted me, and I lost too, and my husband was almost ruined."

"I fainted and he brought me to my room, and went back to play."

"He staked his life against that of his adversary at cards, and, winning, cruelly killed the man."

"Then he fled for his life, and here is the letter he wrote me."

The woman who had listened to this story took the letter and carefully read it through, her face the while growing hard and stern.

"It is like him," she said.

"He has deserted me."

"There is no doubt of it."

"I am content, for I have no hope now; but I would tell you that my father left a fortune, and the names of his New York attorneys my husband could not discover."

"But I had a letter from them, which I did not show him, and I have written down how I wish my fortune disposed of, for it is mine now, and that I wish you to see to."

"I will."

"I have given my kins-people something, and devote the rest to charity, in atonement for my false step which brought me to what I now am."

"And your husband?"

"Let him go his way; but I am revengeful now, even though I lie here under the shadow of death, and I would be glad were his cruel life put to an end, that he might do no more harm in the world."

At these words the strange woman sprung to her feet and cried, in a voice that was full of suppressed passion:

"I am glad to hear you say that, for now no bar stands between me and my vow, for I have sworn to shadow Kent Kingdon, the Card King, as he is called, to his very grave, for bitterly has he wronged me also."

CHAPTER VIII.

A GRAVE-MARKED TRAIL.

THE impassioned words and manner of the woman who had so strangely crossed her life fairly startled Isabel.

She knew that there was a secret tie between the Card King and the stranger.

"Have you, too, suffered at his hands?" she asked.

"You have told me your story, and I will tell you mine; but let me ask you to await my return."

She left the room abruptly, and went out in search of the man who had accompanied her to Sunset City Camps.

She found him enjoying a pipe, while seated under a tree, and it was very evident that he had made sundry visits to the bar.

"Crockett, you have been drinking, so I am glad to have a chance to send you out of the way of temptation," she said, sternly.

"Well, pard, what is to be done?" and the man looked sheepish at having been so cleverly caught.

"Listen!"

"I'm all ears, pard."

"The Gambler King is not here."

"So the landlord said."

"Nor will he return, for he shot a man in cold blood, and the miners would hang him."

"There are other camps for him to go to."

"Yes; and I wish you to take his trail."

"And you?"

"He left his poor wife here dying, and I will remain with her, for I have told her that I am a woman."

"Yes, pard."

"You take the trail of the Card King, and when you have found him, and discovered where he is likely to remain for a while, come back here to me."

"Here is money for you, and I will pay you well if you find him."

"I will thank you, for I am poor, though for you to find the Card King is for me to get my revenge."

"When shall I start?"

"At once, and remember there is no danger of snake bites, so do not take any medicine along for a contingency, for you will be useless if you do."

"I understand, pard, and I'll keep sober, never fear."

After a few words more the disguised woman returned to the house, and the man, after getting his supper mounted his horse and started off on the trail of the Card King, for he had heard of his having met the stage-coach the day before, so formed his own ideas as to where he would go from that point.

Returning to the invalid's room Kent King, as the woman called herself in her disguise of a man, seemed to wear a more satisfied look.

"I promised to tell you my story, as you have told me yours, and it will show you that I also have cause to remember Kent Kingdon too—"

"Kent Kingdon?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"The Card King."

"His name is Donald King."

"That is an alias, as he is also called Don King, the Card King and the Gambler King."

"And that is not his real name?"

"No, it is Kent Kingdon."

"You are sure of this?"

"Perfectly sure, for I have long known him."

"Can there not be some mistake in the man?"

"None whatever."

"Ah! I see you still wish to believe him better than he is; but if he deceived you in other things why not about his name?"

"True."

"His name is Kent Kingdon. I first met him when he became a student at an Eastern college, for my home was in the town where the college was located."

"I was fascinated with him at first sight, and we were engaged; but it was broken off, and I met one who convinced me that I had never really loved Kent Kingdon, for this one I loved with my whole soul."

"He, too, was a student at the college, and from the West, Kingdon being from Texas, where it was said he had led a very wild life."

"One night in Kingdon's rooms, the young man to whom I was engaged found my photograph in an album lying on a table."

"Kingdon could have explained about it, but, instead spoke of me as one of his cast-off loves. Horace Manners resented his words; a duel followed and the one I so dearly loved was killed."

"Poor girl!" said Isabel.

"It was said that I showed little feeling for the death of Horace Manners; but those who said so did not know me. I felt so deeply that I vowed to have revenge."

"Poor Horace was buried, and I erected over him a monument, while Kingdon fled to escape the gallows."

"Then I received a legacy unexpectedly, my brother who is in the army, and myself, and I determined to at once carry out my vow."

"I placed my fortune in a bank, with orders to pay the interest at a certain point, and, leaving my friends to believe that I had committed suicide, started upon my trail after Kent Kingdon."

"I need not tell you how I studied to appear as a man, cutting off my hair, changing my walk, and in other ways making up to disguise my sex, while I practiced riding, and with rifle, revolver and cards until I became an expert."

"I at last struck the trail of the man I sought, and I discovered that his mission seemed to be to kill, for graves of his digging marked the trail."

"He had beaten off the road-agents from the stage-coach in which you were a passenger, but he had himself stolen the treasure and hidden it, leaving all to believe that the robbers had taken it."

"He in some way found your father, and I believe that he ended his life, in the hope of getting his fortune, and you he married to obtain it."

"I have tracked him through all, and everywhere I have found that he left death behind him."

"Such is the man whom you are now free from, and such is the man whom I have vowed to track to the bitter end."

"Now, my dear friend, remember that I will remain with you to the end, if die you must; but if I can make you well I will do so, and you will live to see that guilty wretch brought to punishment for his crimes."

"No, no! I would let him go, for I have loved him too dearly to feel revenge against him now."

"I am too near the grave to feel bitter against even the man who has so cruelly wronged me."

"But you are my friend, and into your keeping I leave all, and to you give my dying requests, for I know that you will do as I ask you."

"In every particular, yes, depend upon it."

was the firm response of the woman who had so untiringly followed the grave-marked trail of the Card King.

CHAPTER IX. TREACHERY.

In the mining-camp in New Mexico, preparations were being made to send a mule-train to a point where the Overland Trail could be reached, where stage-coaches could carry eastward the precious metal dug from the mines by thrifty men.

It was said that the train would be a valuable one, though not many mules would be needed as pack-animals, and the drivers would consist of miners returning home with their fortunes, dug out of the earth.

There were a score of men, perhaps, to go along, some of them with twenty thousand dollars in gold dust, and others possessing not one-fourth that sum; but, altogether, it was enough to tempt road-agents to wish to rob their owners of the fruits of their hard toil, and knowing this danger all went well-armed and prepared in any emergency, for Indians were also to be dreaded along the trail.

It was the day before the mule-train was to set out from the mines that a man was robbed in front of his little cabin apparently lost in deep thought.

A glance into the face, and though he wore the rough garb of the miner, the dark, fascinating face of the Card King was recognizable.

His hands were not as white and soft, as when last seen in the Good Luck Hall at Sunset City, for he had been working in the mines since then, though he still played a game of cards with his comrades whenever there was a dollar to be won.

He had made his way to the mines of New Mexico, taken in the situation there very quickly, and then decided to become a miner—for a purpose.

He had a covey little cabin, had bought out a lead that paid a small sum daily, and had devoted himself to hard work.

He had laid by his earnings, and was preparing to go east with a few comrades, who were content with what they had gotten and were to return home.

So matters stood on the day when he is again presented to the reader.

Presently a man appeared in view over the ridge, and stood looking toward the cabin.

The man crouched behind a boulder, as though not wishing to be seen, and then gave a call like a wood-bird.

The Card King started, looked about him and beckoned to the man as his eyes fell upon him.

The stranger left the shelter of the boulder and walked rapidly toward the cabin.

"Well, Dix, I feared you would never come, and that my plan would fall through," he said, as the man approached him.

The stranger was a man of giant size, with broad shoulders, full chest and a face that bore villain indelibly stamped upon it.

He was clad in half buckskin, half miner costume, and was ragged and dirt-stained; but he carried a rifle and two revolvers and these were of the best make and well cared for, showing that he knew their full value when in good condition, their uselessness when out of order.

"Well, did you see the chief?"

"I always hit what I aim for, pard."

"Well?"

"He'll be on hand."

"Where?"

"At the canyon I told you of."

"Dead Man's Pass?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Four days from to-day."

"And how many braves will he have with him?"

"Enough."

"That is no answer."

"You said there would be about twenty in your party?"

"Yes."

"He will have two for one."

"Good!"

"The surprise and position will make his force equal to a hundred."

"True."

"I arranged signals all right."

"That was right; but what are they to be?"

"I noticed that you can make your horse neigh when you wish."

"Yes, by a trick I have taught him."

"Well, when you enter the prairie end of the canyon, make your horse neigh twice."

"All right."

"It will be heard at the further end, and all will be in readiness."

"And I?"

"Must be the last man in the line, and drop back as far as you can, for when the red-skins fire from ambush, you wheel and ride back so as to pass through the line and give the Indians a chance to shoot those who follow you."

"I see, and you have planned well, Dix."

"And I get one-third of the gold?"

"Yes, excepting my pack."

"And the chief gets another third?"

"Yes."

"You the balance?"

"Yes."

"Grand! now I'll be off, for, as you know this is not a healthy neighborhood for me since I killed Watson some time ago, and I'll never forget that you saved me from being hanged, though the business did exile me."

"It is safe for you to go, but lie in hiding until you see the train start, and then go on and have the chief and his braves ready to welcome us."

"I'll do it, and, as I don't feel comfortable in these diggings I'll start at once."

Without another word the man wheeled on his heel and walked away, leaving the Card King again in deep thought, as he resumed his seat upon the bench in front of his cabin.

CHAPTER X.

FOR THE SAKE OF GOLD.

Dix had long been a desperado in the mines of New Mexico, and his skill with rifle, revolver and bowie-knife, added to his undoubted plans and wonderful strength had made him greatly feared.

So long as he kept hands off of any one who was a particular favorite among the miners, he was allowed to have his way, and kill *ad libitum*.

But one day he was caught cheating at cards, and his adversary was the most popular man in the camp.

Accusing Dix of cheating, the man would have backed up his words with his revolver, which he attempted to draw, but was not quick enough and fell across the table with a bullet in his brain.

This settled it for the desperado, for the friends of the dead man would have hanged him but for the interference of the Card King.

Kent Kingdon, as the reader now knows him, was a new man in the mines.

He had arrived but a short while, and, luckily for him, had brought news of an intended Indian raid upon the mines, in force enough to massacre them all if caught napping.

The Indians were beaten off, and the miners made a hero of the gambler.

He purchased a lead, with a small cabin near, and set to work.

He had much magnetism of manner and at once became popular, and so when he sprung to the rescue of the desperado the rush to hang him was checked.

He spoke but a few words, but his reasoning was good.

"You have no proof that Dix cheated, for there lies his accuser."

"He made the accusation and then attempted to draw, but Dix was the quickest and defended his own life."

"You do not like Dix, I know; but be square, pards, and don't hang a man for defending his own life."

This argument was accepted, and Dix was allowed to go; but he was told to leave the camps within two hours, and never to return under penalty of being hanged.

Dix did not leave the neighborhood, but hung around in the mountains, hoping for a chance to settle a few old scores, and Kent Kingdon fed him.

Then the gambler discovered a chance to make a fortune at one blow.

So he sought Dix and sent him on a mission, and that was to Thunder Cloud, an Indian chief, whom he knew well, and had once served.

That plot will be made known in the conversation that followed the departure of Dix, between Kent Kingdon and a horseman who rode up to the cabin soon after the departure of the desperado.

The sound of hoofs coming along the trail toward his cabin caused the gambler to look up quickly, and reach for his rifle, which stood near.

Soon a horseman appeared in sight, and, at a slower pace came on toward the cabin.

"Well, pard, is it fight or friendship?" called out the gambler, rising as the horseman came near.

"Friendship every time, pard, if you are Don the Card King."

"Ah! and who are you that knows me by a name I do not wear here?" and the gambler became more suspicious.

"I am your friend, and I came here to find you."

"I do not remember that we have met."

"I remember you way back in the Colorado camps, pard, and I am here to serve you."

"To serve me."

"So I said."

"Out with it."

"I've come a long trail, and both myself and horse are tired, and I'm hungry too."

"Pardon my inhospitality."

"There is a plot you can stake your horse to feed on, and you see the brook near, while I have food and shelter always for a comrade, always."

The man staked his horse out, leaving his arms on the bench at the cabin, as a proof that he meant no harm, and then said, when he returned:

"Comrade, when I've had some supper I can talk better."

"I've just lighted the fire, so we'll have supper soon," and the man, elegant in manners as a courtier, set to work to prepare the meal.

It was soon discovered, pipes were lighted and the stranger said:

"Suppose I were to tell you that I am on your trail to kill you?"

"Open the ball whenever you please," was the cool response.

"Oh! I do not mean to say that I intend to do so; but I was hired to track you down."

"Indeed!"

"So."

"And who is your employer?"

"Try and guess."

"I cannot."

"Who have you greatly wronged?"

"Many," was the quiet response.

"You are frank at least."

"Why not be?"

"Men generally seek to hide their crimes."

"Mine have been open."

"Are you not curious to know who your foe is?"

"You said that you were."

"I was hired to take your trail and find you."

"Well?"

"I tracked you from Sunset City, which place you left after claiming the life of Bart Bradley, a miner, as a stake in a game of cards."

"You seem to know me."

"I do."

"Go on."

"You deserted your wife there at the Pilgrim's Roost Hotel."

"Ah! she has sent you on my trail."

"You are mistaken, for she lies at the point of death."

"Ah!"

There was surprise, not grief in the exclamation.

"Yes, she had a severe hemorrhage, after you left, and, but for the coming of an army surgeon, one whom you have doubtless heard of as the Surgeon Scout, she would have died."

"Yes, his name is Frank Powell, and he is the pard of Buffalo Bill, while he is said to be a splendid scout."

"That is the man."

"Well, about the one who sent you on my track?"

"It is a woman."

"Indeed!"

"It is."

"And not my wife?"

"No."

"Who is she then?"

"One whom you have in some way wronged, for she has been on your track for a long time, trailed you from the northern mines, down into other scenes, getting your record down everywhere, and is now preparing to have you killed, or hanged."

"Who is she?"

"One who says she can hang you."

"Her name?"

"I know her only as one who has figured as the Card Queen in the mines."

"The Card Queen! I have heard of such a woman, and she is said to be both beautiful and dangerous."

"She is both, and she means danger to you."

"But I do not know her."

"But she knows you."

"I cannot believe it."

"I can, for I know; but she is one whom you have forgotten."

"And she threatens my life?"

"Yes, and will follow you to the grave."

"You are sure there is no mistake?"
 "None."
 "You have proof?"
 "I have the proof that she offered me a snug sum to track you, and then come back to take her to you, while, if there was a chance of your escape, I was to kill you."
 "Well, which course have you decided upon?"
 "I have decided to get gold from you as well as from her."
 "Ah! then you wish to make terms with me?"
 "I do."
 "Not to kill me, or to lead her to me?"
 "Yes."
 "How can you serve us both?"
 "For gold from you I could convince her that you was dead."
 "Ah! I see," and the gambler smiled in a way that showed a new thought had crossed his mind, brought there by the suggestion of his strange visitor.

CHAPTER XI.

A WELL-LAID PLOT.

CROCKETT, the man who had been the companion of the fair Nemesis upon the latter part of her trailing Kent Kingdon the Card King, was a strange creature indeed.

He had been a scout at a frontier fort, but had given it up to turn miner when a gold fever swept along the border.

Gold was his god, and he hoped to amass a fortune in a short while.

He had come from the East, and his brother, fully as great a reprobate as himself, had been his partner when the two took to mining; but gold was not found as readily as they had hoped, so, villains at heart, they had gone upon the trail as road-agents.

It was their band that had attacked the coach in which Kent King was a passenger, along with Isabel Drew, who had afterward become his unhappy wife.

They had suffered at the hands of the Card King, and afterward the brother of Crockett, knowing that the gambler had hidden the treasure carried by the coach, after the death of the driver, and reported in the camps that the robbers had taken it, sought him out and charged him with it.

The result was that the road-agent found a resting-place in the graveyard near the mining-camps.

But Crockett knew of his brother's intention to visit the Card King, and was aware of the fatal termination of that visit.

So he vowed revenge upon the gambler, and in following the trail of vengeance met with the fair Nemesis, Camille Cameron, who was tracking Kent Kingdon down for having killed her lover, Horace Manners, in the duel fought at college.

Crockett wished to avenge his brother, but he wished to get gold also, and one must give way for the other.

So he decided to serve the Beautiful Shadower, as he called Camille, and also serve himself.

He had found the Card King, and he at once decided to see if he could not make him pay *not to be killed*, as well as have the Beautiful Shadower pay.

So it was that he told his mission frankly to the Card King, and suggested a plan that would be satisfactory all around, while he mentally agreed that he could secure his own revenge afterward, if so he wished, when no further gold could be gotten from the Card King.

"What is your plan, pard?" asked the Card King, when Crockett made his proposition.

"My plan is to go back and report to the Beautiful Shadower that you are dead, and this will stop her trailing you."

"I see. And for this, you wish me to pay you?"

"Yes."

"How much do you want?"

"How much is your life worth to you?"

"It is worth defending."

"Oh, yes; but its financial value?"

"Well, say I give you a couple of thousands?"

"Not enough."

"Add a thousand?"

"Not enough."

The Card King was silent for some moments, and then said:

"You have come at a very opportune moment."

"Why so?"

"I am leaving the camps with a mule-train that goes to the nearest stage station."

"Well?"

"There are something like a score of miners

going along, all with their gold dust, and intending to return home."

"I see."

"I have some dust, and I am going with the party."

"Well, pard."

"I would not be at all surprised if the train was set upon by red-skins, say, and the miners massacred."

"Then why do you go, pard?"

"I might escape, you know."

"Ah! I see."

"And if a man was trailing the party, say yourself, for instance, and should come on after the massacre, you might get a share of the gold, you know."

"Yes, and I might get a share of the lead."

"No, you would not so suffer, because, you know, it would be important for you to report to this Card Queen that the Card King was dead."

"I understand."

"I am glad that you do."

"What's first to be done?"

"I guess you had better camp here, taking my cabin and diggings off of my hands, and then you can easily trail the miners."

"You might, in fact, be the only one who escaped, you know, and so report at the fort, which will be some forty miles from the scene, and thus there would be no doubt about the affair."

"So I see, and it would not be a bad idea. You are a good plotter, Mr. Card King."

"Yes, I have had some experience in plotting; but you agree to these terms?"

"About how much booty do I get?"

"There will be about sixty thousand along, I guess."

"No more?"

"Hardly, for the miners in these parts have none of them struck it very rich."

"And you will get that much?"

"Oh, no, for the red-skins, you must understand, are to have their share."

"I see, and you the balance?"

"Yes, and I am willing to share with you."

"Where will I put it?"

"You can hide it first, then go to the fort, and afterward report to the Card Queen."

"When she has paid you, then you can return and get your hidden gold, and go your way."

"And you?"

"Will have gone mine."

"Where?"

"That is my own business."

"Shall we not be pards?"

"I had rather not, for I am the pard of no man."

"Well, you know best; but I like your plot, and, as I see money in it for myself, I will agree to it," was the reply of Crockett, and thus the deep laid plot of wickedness was arranged.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MIDNIGHT MEETING.

SOME days after the scene just related at the cabin of the Card King, a small party of horsemen were going into camp in a defile of the mountains.

Their appearance indicated that they were miners, and they were well-mounted and armed, while there were a number of pack-mules along.

Less than a score there were in the party, and all seemed to be in a genial humor.

Among them was one who is well-known to the reader, for it was the Card King.

He alone of the party was silent, almost moody, and when the mules had been relieved of their precious burden, the horses staked out, a cheerful fire built and supper dispatched, one of the men said:

"Come, pard, you look gloomy."

"Haven't you any wife or sweetheart to welcome you back?"

"No," said the Card King.

"I am alone in the world, and it is seeing you all so happy that makes me feel blue."

"Come, sing us a song, and it will make you feel better."

"Yes, a song, a song, pard!"

The cries went around the circle, for all knew that the Card King sung well, and thus urged he arose and going to his pack-saddle took therefrom a guitar.

Then through the timber floated his splendid voice in melody, as he sung some beautiful ballad.

The miners sat spell-bound, and into the eyes of many there came tears as they listened.

There was no applause, the low-spoken words and urging to sing again being far more expressive.

Again and again the Card King sung, until

there was not a dry eye among the group of strong men, for he had chosen the most plaintive ballads.

Then he arose and walked away from the camp-fire in moody silence.

As though unwilling to break the charm upon them, the miners said but little, as one by one they stole away from the circle, wrapped themselves in their blankets and sought rest.

There was no thought of danger, and the camp was soon in deep repose.

In the mean time the Card King had walked at a brisk pace down the vale.

Now and then he would halt and look back, as though to see if he was followed, and then he would continue on his way.

At last he halted by a large rock, and gave a low whistle.

It was repeated after a moment, and then came an answer from a distance.

Thus the whistles from the Card King and some one else were repeated, until suddenly a man appeared near the rock.

"Dix!"

"Yes."

"I expected I would find you dogging the trail, so came out to find you."

"Yes, I had turned in over yonder, when I heard you call."

"Well, go on ahead, and have old Thunder meet me to-morrow night near our camp."

"I will walk out, as now, and you will find me, for I will leave our camping-place about bedtime, after singing a few songs, and you can be on the watch."

"You wish to see the chief, then?"

"Yes, for I think I can make better terms with him."

"All right, I'll be on hand with him, and the next morning, soon after you start, you will be in Dead Man's Pass."

"Yes."

"And Thunder and his braves will not be far off, you can count on that, while I'll be in the vicinity, too," and with a hoarse laugh the man turned away, while the Card King retraced his way to the camp.

If any one noticed his coming into camp, they did not speak of it, and soon after he was fast asleep.

The next night the miners found a snug camping-place, and once more were they seated around the camp-fire engaged in pleasant intercourse, for their spirits rose with each day nearer home.

"Pards, do you wish a song?" asked the Card King suddenly.

A chorus of voices answered in the affirmative, and the man, whose splendid voice could bring tears to the eyes of strong men, began again to sing songs that could not but touch their better nature.

For some time he sung to them, willingly repeating a ballad, and singing each one that was requested by some one of the group, and then suddenly walking away alone as on the night before.

"Poor pard, he seems in trouble," said one.

"Well, he can sing and no mistake."

"He's got some deep sorrow to bear."

"He's the handsomest feller as ever I seen in these parts."

"And a gentleman clean through."

"He's got nerve too, in spite o' his good looks."

"I wonder what ails him?"

So ran the conversation around the camp-fire, until again the miners turned in for the night.

They held no fear of danger, for they were confident of their own ability to beat off a foe, and in fact they had no suspicion that one was near.

Their horses and mules were staked out near, their precious packs were by the camp-fire, and so without dread they lay down to sleep, it having been agreed that any one of their number waking up would make a round of the camp to see that all was well.

Right down the defile went the Card King, and after a walk of five minutes he heard his name called.

The voice came from a pine thicket on his left.

"Dix."

"I'm here," and the man appeared before him.

"And the chief?"

"Is here."

As Dix spoke an Indian, in all the rig of a full chief, appeared.

"Glad to see white brother," he said as he grasped the hand of the Card King.

"And I am glad to see you, chief."

"Where are your braves?"

"Dead Man Pass."

"Good! how many?"

He held up his hands four times, to show that there were forty.

"All right; now I have a mule with a pack full of things I got at the settlers' for you."

"Then you are to have all the horses, except two, and all the mules but three."

"The weapons and clothing of the men, and their scalps too are yours."

"Yes, good!"

"And my white brother?"

"Will take the yellow dust, and, with his friend here go our way."

"Thunder love yellow dust."

"You cannot use it, if you get it; besides, chief, you get the scalps."

"Good!"

"When come?"

"In the morning."

"Thunder be there."

"All right, good-by."

Thus the two parted, and the man who had so coolly planned death to his comrades, returned to the camp and was soon calmly sleeping.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MASSACRE.

THE sun was just rising over the mountain tops, and sending rays of warm light into the valley to dispell the mists, when the miners marched into a canyon that penetrated a lofty range.

The canyon was narrow, scarcely over a hundred yards in width, the sides precipitous, and it wound crookedly along through the mountain range.

The guide said that the canyon was known as Dead Man's Pass, as it was told how many a band of Indians, in former years, had been ambushed there, and on one occasion a small tribe had been put to death there by some foes.

Then, too, it was known that a party of settlers had met their death there, and, in proof of the guide's story many human bones were seen scattered about the canyon.

These stories caused the miners to clutch their arms more closely, and to ride in a more compact mass, though they really had no dread of themselves being attacked, for no red-skins were known to be on the war-path.

The Card King laughed at their huddling together, and dropped back in the rear quite a distance.

As though wishing to close up the gap again, the splendid animal which the gambler rode suddenly broke forth in an impatient neigh.

Again and again he repeated the uncanny neigh, until one of the miners called out:

"Muzzle the brute, pard, for durn me ef he don't see speerits, if it are dog-time."

The Card King laughed, and held the animal back until he was quite a distance in the rear of the train, so closely huddled together.

Just after turning a bend in the pass, suddenly through the mists hanging on the canyon's sides, came the red flashes of firearms.

Then before them came other red flashes and reports, and from their saddles dropped the stricken men.

Some turned to fly, but the rifles of their unseen foes rung out death-knells upon them, and at last the canyon was filled with dead and dying men, while their horses and mules ran wildly about, or were huddled together in alarm.

If a wounded man was seen to move, a shot would ring forth and he would be slain.

At the first fire the Card King had wheeled his horse and darted back down the canyon.

But he did not go far before drawing rein.

Then he coolly sat in his saddle, listening to the rattle of the firearms, the cries of his comrades, neighing of the horses and the ringing war-cries of ambushed Indians.

It did not last long, this unequal struggle for life against an unseen foe.

The firing soon ceased, and then down the steep sides of the canyon, from their hiding-places, came two-score of red-skins in all their fierce war-paint.

"Has the Thunder kept faith with his white brother?" asked the chief, coming up to the Card King, as he sat upon his horse.

"Yes; but none must be left alive."

"No, all dead."

"And my messenger?"

"I am here, pard. The red work was neatly done, eh?" said Dix coming up to them.

"Yes."

"All are dead, or will be when the braves have looked them over."

"So must it be; but Thunder, you go forward first, and then call us."

The chief did so, and soon after the gambler and Dix advanced.

Cold-blooded as they were they could not but shudder at the scene that met their gaze.

The miners were all dead. The braves, too, had scalped them and were gloating over their horrid trophies.

The frightened horses and mules were huddled together, a few of them slightly wounded, for they had not been aimed at, and one only had been killed.

It did not take the Indians long to strip their victims, secure horses and arms, and with the booty given them from the packs get ready to depart.

"Is my red brother satisfied?" asked the gambler of the chief.

The Indian's face lighted up with delight.

He had secured a number of scalps, horses, mules, booty and weapons, and not a warrior had been killed or wounded.

"The Thunder is pleased," he said.

"Then let him hurry back to his people, for there are soldiers from the fort not far away."

The chief was only too anxious to obey, and bidding a hasty farewell to the gambler and his wicked comrade in crime, he mounted one of the miners' horses and led the way out of the canyon, followed by the braves with the mules and their booty.

The dead were left in the canyon where they had fallen, and in their midst stood the Card King and Dix, each one with a horse, and the gambler holding the lariats of three pack-mules, the animals carrying the precious metal which he had reserved as his own reward for his cruel infamy.

"Well, comrade, the affair went off without a hitch," said Dix.

"True, and we have the gold."

"I was afraid that the chief was going to claim some of the dust."

"No, he had that which suited him best."

"Well, I suppose we share alike?"

"Yes, I guess so."

"I think it's but square that we should, for I took all the chances as you did."

"Pard Dix, when I raise an objection to dividing equally with you, then it will be time for you to growl."

"Now let us get away from here, for I don't like this spot."

"I don't wonder, and I guess I'll dream of it for many a long night."

"Don't be a fool— Hark! did you not hear a sound of hoofs down the canyon?"

Dix turned his head to listen, and as he did so there came the sharp report of a pistol ringing through the canyon and he fell dead in his tracks.

CHAPTER XIV.

WITHOUT MERCY.

THE shot which had dropped Desperado Dix in his tracks, had come from the revolver of the gambler.

He was not a man to share any booty where a life only stood between his getting it all.

He wished too to get rid of a white man who knew that he had plotted the killing of his comrades.

With the secret in his own heart, and known only to the Indian chief and his braves, he did not fear being found out.

He had not forgotten Crockett, and his engagement with him there, it was true.

But then Crockett knew not that he had planned the death of the miners.

He might suspect it, but he did not know it.

He must take his story of it as true.

With all his courage Kent Kingdon felt a dread of this mysterious woman upon his track.

He could not make out who she was.

Had it been his wife he would have felt no dread; but this unknown woman, who was trailing him, as Crockett had said, to bring him to the gallows, worried him more than he cared to admit even to himself.

He would not think of putting an end to her life, for he was superstitious, and felt that bad luck would ever dog the steps of the man who had taken the life of a woman.

No, he must share with Crockett, have him go back and tell this mysterious shadower that he was dead, had been massacred with a party of miners, and thus he would no longer fear her, and go his way without dread, wherever that way would lead him.

Stepping up to the man, who, a moment before, had been in full life and hope, he felt his pulse.

"Dead, of course," he muttered, as though he felt sure that his bullet had gone straight to the heart.

Then he walked up to one of the bodies of the miners and looked at the ugly round mark in his head, from which the quivering scalp had been torn.

"I think I can do it as scientifically," he muttered, and returning to the body of Dix he bent over and with his knife, *scalped him*.

Then he stripped him of his arms and clothing, drove a knife into his heart, as much to make sure of his death, as to give another wound supposed to have been given by red-skins, and then he mounted his horse, and with the other animals in lead he rode rapidly away from the spot, as though anxious to leave the fatal place.

He had not gone far beyond the mouth of the canyon before he halted and hitched the animals, except his own horse.

This one he rode back toward the canyon, and soon approached the scene of the cruel massacre.

As he came in sight he saw a horseman coming down the canyon.

At a glance he recognized him.

It was Crockett.

"Well, pard, this is an ugly sight," called out Crockett, as they drew near, for he, too, recognized the gambler the moment his eyes fell upon him.

"Ugly! I should say it was, and I barely escaped from lying here with these poor comrades of mine," and Kent Kingdon spoke with deep feeling.

"Yes, I see; but you escaped all the same."

"How was it?"

"We were attacked here in the canyon, and I, being in the rear some paces—"

"I see."

"Managed to dash back down the pass, while a few of the pack-mules and one of the horses also broke through and followed me."

"I hope they escaped all right?"

"Oh, yes, I have them hitched down the canyon."

"I am glad; but the red-skins did their work well here."

"They did, indeed; but you had better go with me now."

"Where?"

"To get your pay, and then it would be well for you, after you have hidden it, to ride to the fort and report that all of your comrades were massacred by the Utes—"

"Were they Utes?"

"No Sioux, but it would be as well to say Utes, you know."

"Yes, better, perhaps."

"After you have brought the soldiers to the spot, you can start to return to the mines, to dig out another fortune, you know, and then go and report my death to my Beautiful Shadower."

"I will."

"Then you have only to return for your gold and go your way with a handsome sum in your hands."

"Yes, but why can we not become pards, afterwards?"

"I shall not remain on the border."

"Ah! you will go East to spend your gold, I suppose."

"Perhaps."

"But suppose the Beautiful Shadower does not believe my story?"

"She must, if you have to bring her here to see my grave."

"She's a terror, and may wish to see the corpse."

"Ah! well, do you see that man?"

"Yes, and Crockett glanced at one of the miners."

"Well, he does not look much unlike me, and a wound across his face will prevent close scrutiny."

"Then I'll give you this ring, for it has my name inside of it, and is one that will be recognized by a person who knows me."

"If the Beautiful Shadower should come here, this man's corpse is to represent mine, so get the soldiers to bury it separately, and see that, if she wishes it dug up, that you pretend to find this ring on the little finger."

"You are a sharp one."

"Here, take the ring, and let us be off."

Crockett laughed and obeyed, and they soon after reached the spot where the gambler had left the pack-mules and Dix's horse.

The gold dust was opened and divided, Crockett feeling convinced that he was getting his share, if the gambler had more hidden away, and so he took his treasure, bade Kent Kingdon farewell and rode away, first to find a hiding-place for his gold, and then to go on to the fort and make a false report of the massacre of the miners.

Hardly had he departed when Kent Kingdon plunged further into the wilds leading the horse and mules, and after a ride of half an hour came to a brook.

This he entered, turning down the stream, and after a mile came to a halt.

He hitched the animals, his own horse with the others, to trees on the side of the stream, and in such a way that they must still stand in the water.

Then he set forth on foot and at a quick pace returned to the spot where Crockett had left him.

He seemed to be a most expert trailer, for he readily followed the track of Crockett's horse, and went along upon it at a very rapid walk.

For several miles he followed it, and then saw that the trail halted at a large tree.

There he discovered that the horse had evidently been hitched for awhile, and examining the trunk of the tree carefully, he said:

"He's as sharp as I am, for he has found a good hiding-place for it."

"But I'll be sure."

Up the tree he climbed, and there, as he had expected he would find, was a hollow place in the trunk.

Dry leaves hid it from view; but these were removed and beneath them were found the bags of gold-dust, nicely stowed away.

"He has hidden them well," muttered the gambler, and leaving them there replaced the leaves as before, descended the tree and returned at a rapid pace to where he had left his horses.

Mounting, he again continued on down the stream until darkness came, when he sought a camping-place for the night, seemingly much contented with himself after his cruel work of the day.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SURGEON SCOUT.

Two horsemen were approaching each other across a plain, and each one was upon his guard to greet friend or foe, as the case might be.

One of the two was none other than Crockett, the man who had taken the trail of the Card King, to avenge his dead brother, but who had decided that a good sum of gold was sweeter than revenge.

At least he had come to the conclusion that his revenge could wait until he had filled his pockets.

He was on the way to the fort, from Dead Man's Pass, and had discovered a horseman approaching him.

"It is a soldier, so I have nothing to fear," he muttered, as he discovered that the horseman was dressed in a uniform.

"Yes, an officer too."

"What can he be doing alone on the prairies."

"I guess he's gotten separated from his command."

The one coming toward him was a soldier, and an officer too, for he wore straps upon his shoulders denoting his rank as a surgeon in the United States Army.

A look into his stern, handsome face showed him to be none other than Surgeon Powell, whom the reader last saw by the bedside of the dying wife of the Card King.

He was dressed in a fatigue jacket, wore a black sombrero incircled by a gold cord, and leggings of buckskin, stuck in high-top cavalry boots.

He had a repeating rifle hung at his back, and in his belt were a pair of handsome revolvers and a bowie-knife.

In a holster on his saddle was another revolver, and opposite to it, handy to his grasp, was a leather pouch of ammunition.

A roll of blankets at the back of his saddle, a hammock and a few other things showed that he was prepared for a trip of days, if need be.

At his saddle-horn hung a long lariat, and altogether his rig was most thorough for a hunt on the plains, or in the mountains, whether the game he hunted was of the human or brute kind.

Crockett had not only heard of the Surgeon Scout, but had seen him, and recognized him as he drew nearer.

He remembered to have seen him in a mining-camp on one occasion when he and his brothers were miners, and he recalled how surgeon Frank Powell had on that occasion quelled a disturbance.

"He's a man whose good will I wish," he muttered, and, as he drew near he politely raised his hat.

The surgeon returned the salute and a

moment after the two men halted near each other.

"Well, my man, which way?" asked Powell in his full, rich voice, his hand however ready to grasp his revolver if there was need for it.

"To the fort, sir, and I am glad to have met you, Surgeon Powell."

"You know me?"

"Yes, sir, your name is well-known on the plains; but I once saw you in the Wildcat City mines."

"Ah, yes; but where are you from?"

"Been mining down in New Mexico, sir, and, with some pards was making my way to the Overland Trail, when we were attacked in Dead Man's Pass by a band of Ute Indians, and all but myself were massacred. I run off, for I escaped only by being more distance in the rear."

"Oh, sir, it was terrible to see my pards murdered, and not one escaped, for I waited near and went to the scene after the Indians had left."

"Then I started for the fort, sir, which I knew was to the northward."

Crockett told his story in the most sincere manner possible, and Surgeon Powell said, feelingly:

"I am very sorry for you, my man, and I will go at once to the spot with you, for I am now on my way to join a squad of soldiers who left the fort this morning, and I was to meet them at Blue Canyon."

"Oh, sir, I am so glad, for then my poor comrades can be buried before the wolves tear them to pieces."

"Did you have gold with you?" asked Surgeon Powell, as he turned his horse off toward the Dead Man's Pass and rode along with Crockett.

"Yes, sir; it was our savings for a long time, and we were going to carry it East by stage and return to our families; but now that happy day is never to come to my poor pards, while I will have to return to the mines to dig out another small fortune."

"Did the red-skins take your gold?"

"Yes, sir; they carried off the mules with their packs."

"You are sure they were red-skins?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"You saw them?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are sure they were not white men in disguise?"

"I never thought of that, Surgeon Powell."

"There are some robbing renegades about now, and I am on the lookout for them, so they may have been the party who attacked you and your comrades."

"Perhaps so, sir."

"Were your comrades scalped?"

"Yes, sir."

"And stripped of their clothing?"

"Yes, sir."

"How many red-skins, if such they were, did you see?"

"Fully half a hundred, sir."

"Ah! they must have been Indians, then; but perhaps there were renegade whites with them."

"I think we will know when we reach the scene, but it will be dark before we get there."

"Yes, sir."

Surgeon Powell now relapsed into silence and rode on, holding his way toward the Blue Canyon, where he was to join the dozen troopers whom he had told to await him there.

It was almost sunset when they reached the canyon, and rode into the temporary camp of the cavalrymen, who were under command of a sergeant.

"Any signs, Sergeant Fay?" asked the Surgeon Scout.

"None, sir."

"There has been a butchery of miners over in Dead Man's Pass; but we cannot go on to-night through this rough country, and besides, we would gain nothing, so we will start at the very first glimmer of dawn and push on rapidly."

Then supper was eaten, the guards were sent to their posts, and the men turned in for the night.

But before daybreak they were up, had breakfast, and, when light dawned, were on their way to Dead Man's Pass.

The scene that met their gaze, as they entered the canyon, was one to cause the stoutest heart to flinch.

The bodies of the miners lay scattered about, and whole packs of wolves ran yelping and snarling away, while vultures rose from their

feast on human flesh and flew sullenly to roost not far off.

"This is the work of red-skins," said Surgeon Powell, reading the signs as a man would a book.

"This man, sir, was my particular pard, and I'd like to bury him in a grave all alone," and Crockett pointed to the body of the miner who was to be buried as Kent Kingdon.

"They shall all be buried in separate graves, for their friends may wish to remove their bodies some day."

"Give me their names, and I will mark each grave," said the kind-hearted surgeon.

This was a stunner to Crockett; but he was equal to the occasion, and over each grave the name he gave was placed, cut into the bark of a sapling which was made to serve as a head-board.

When the dead were buried, Surgeon Powell took up the trail of the red-skins, on their retreat from the scene, intending to try and overtake them, in spite of his small force, and give them battle.

Crockett, wholly satisfied with the manner in which affairs had turned out, told the Surgeon Scout that he would return to the mines, where he still owned his claim, and report the sad end of his comrades, while he would again set to work to dig another fortune out of his mine, and thus they parted.

But the destination of Crockett was to Sunset City to report to the Beautiful Shadower that Kent Kingdon was dead.

CHAPTER XVI.

PROOF WANTED.

As the Surgeon Scout had predicted, the Queen of Diamonds, poor Isabel, the deserted wife of the Card King, did not recover from her illness, but day by day faded away until at last she was at rest from her sorrows and her sufferings.

Unto the last did Camille, the Beautiful Shadower, remain by her side, and when she breathed her last, her dying words were heard only by the fair Nemesis.

Most deeply attached had Camille Cameron become to the dying woman, and in her hands all had been left that Isabel wished to have attended to.

"Tell him I forgive him, bitter as was the wrong I suffered at his hands," she whispered, a short while before her death.

"You refer to Kent Kingdon?"

"Yes, my husband."

"But he has gone no one knows where."

"You will see him some day, I know," was the response.

During her stay at the hotel no one, not even the landlord had suspected the sex of Camille Cameron. Not an eye had penetrated her disguise, so thoroughly had she studied to hide the fact that she was not a man.

At last the end came, and poor Isabel was laid away in a quiet little vale, and all in the camps followed her to the grave.

It was a touching scene at that lowly grave, when the miners stood with uncovered heads while the Beautiful Shadower, in her disguise as a youth, repeated the funeral service over the body of the Queen of Diamonds.

Then the voices of a score of miners rung forth in mighty volume singing:

"I would not live away."

It was grandly sung, and tears came into many eyes, while many could not but recall how appropriate were the words in that wild region where it was a hard struggle to live at all.

Several days after the burial of the Diamond Queen Crockett returned to Pilgrim's Roost and was warmly welcomed by the Beautiful Shadower.

She led him aside at once and asked eagerly:

"Well, what luck?"

"I found him."

"Where?"

"In a New Mexico mining-camp."

"Gambling?"

"A little; but he had turned miner."

"Ah! you are sure it was the Card King?"

"No one could mistake that man, once they saw him."

"He did not know you?"

"I'll tell you just how it was."

"I heard of such a man, as I went from camp to camp, and at last found him, as I said, in New Mexico."

"Yes."

"He was working a claim, but was preparing to leave with some miners who had gotten their little pile and were going to start for home."

"I decided to go along, for I wished to find out where he was going to halt."

"So the mule train, with the dust, was made up, and nearly a score of miners started, the Card King and myself being along with them. One day, as we were nearing the Overland Trail—"

"Which one?"

"To the north, and the stage-road."

"Well?"

"The miners intended to reach a camp, or station on the Overland and there sell out their stock, taking their dust on by stage-coach."

"I understand."

"Well, it was half a day's ride from the fort, and in Dead Man's Pass, one morning soon after day, we were ambushed by red-skins."

"Was he killed?"

"I was the only one to escape, and I only got away because I was some way back in the rear of the train."

"He was killed?" asked the Shadower, hoarsely.

"Yes."

"I do not believe it."

"It is true, for the red-skins did not stay long after finishing their red work, but robbed the bodies and set off with the animals."

"And you?"

"I do not believe they saw me."

"Strange."

"At least they did not follow me, and so I did not go far away, but returned cautiously, as I saw them ascending the mountains, and then saw what had been done."

"You saw his body?"

"I did."

"You are sure he was dead?"

"He had a bullet wound in his side, and a knife wound across his face."

"It must be so, though I cannot believe he would die thus."

"How else?"

"On the gallows," was the savage response.

"Well, he escaped it."

"And then?"

"I rode for the fort, to report the affair, and met the Surgeon Scout, Frank Powell, and a party of cavalry."

"The surgeon who visited the Diamond Queen here the day before we came?"

"Yes."

"I have heard much of him."

"Yes, and so has everybody else on the border."

"And then?"

"He went with me to Dead Man's Pass, buried the bodies and marked each grave."

"Then there can be no doubt."

After a moment of silence, the Shadower said, slowly:

"Crockett, it is not because I believe you would lie to me, but because I cannot realize that the Card King is dead, for he has escaped death so often."

"Well, can I prove it in any way that you can think of?"

"Yes, you can get an escort of a few men and go to Dead Man's Pass with me," was the startling rejoinder.

"As you please, for I want you to be convinced," replied Crockett.

Having made up her mind to this course, the beautiful Shadower set about carrying out her determination.

Several men were engaged as an escort, and none of them were let into the secret of her sex.

Then they started, with Crockett as guide, for the Dead Man's Pass, to solve the mystery of the grave in which lay a body over which had been placed the name of Donald King.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN ASSASSIN.

WHATEVER his crimes, Crockett was a good guide, and led the Beautiful Shadower directly to the graves of the miners in Dead Man's Pass.

He even did more, for when the body lying in the grave marked "Donald King" was exhumed, a dirt-stained ring was found, so said the guide, upon the little finger of the dead man, and Camille Cameron recognized it as one she had known Kent Kingdon to have worn.

This seemed to convince her, and she felt that her trail of revenge was at an end, so returning to the Pilgrim's Roost, she started eastward to carry out her pledges to Isabel, as regarded her property.

Having been well paid for his services, Crockett determined to carry out his little plans, for he had more than one.

The first was to go and get the gold he had hidden in a tree not very far from Dead Man's Pass, and then to seek once more to find the Card King.

"If I can find him," he argued, "I will find out where his gold is, and I might as well enrich myself that much more, besides getting my revenge after all by killing him."

"I will start at once, and I'll go prepared for all that may turn up."

So Crockett purchased a fine horse, the best he could get in the camps, kept his old one as a pack-animal, bought all needed supplies of food and ammunition, stole a splendid dog which his owner would not sell, and started forth upon his expedition.

He left at night, and no one saw him depart.

He had made friends with the dog, so that it was not hard, with persuasion and a rope, to get him to go along with him.

The horses were fresh, the dog seemed to like his new master, and Crockett had with him all that he needed for his comfort in the way of blankets, a small canvas shelter, food and weapons.

He seemed greatly elated at his success thus far, and rode along with no presentiment of evil ahead.

He reached Dead Man's Pass before dark, the second day after leaving Pilgrim's Roost, but had no intention of halting for the night in that crime-baunted place, so he pressed on to a good camping-place a few miles beyond.

It was not very far from the spot where he had hidden his treasure in a tree, and he pitched his little tent and went into camp with the delightful hope that the morrow would give him his gold and he would be comparatively a rich man.

It was a cheerful little camp, sheltered in a ravine from the keen winds, and the fire blazed brightly sending forth a warmth that penetrated into the little tent.

In a fryingpan was a bird cooking, and the delicious flavor of boiling bacon and boiling coffee filled the air.

A flask stood near, and from it the lone camper had taken an "appetizer," though he needed nothing of the kind to give zest to his appetite.

The blankets were spread in the little tent, the horses were staked out near, and had plenty of grass to feed upon, while "Gambler," as Crockett called his dog, was enjoying the flavor of the cooking supper.

Had Crockett known that there was a looker-on upon this restful little scene he would not have felt so contented.

But there was one who had noted his coming, had watched him seek out a camping-place and then halt for the night.

"That settles it," said the one whose eyes were upon him.

"I have had a long wait of it, but I knew that he would come."

So saying he shouldered his rifle and walked away through the timber.

He did not go more than half a mile before he turned into a canyon.

The canyon was carpeted with grass in abundance, and along one side of its steep banks ran a crystal stream.

As he walked up the canyon it narrowed until the stream of water filled the space between the walls, and rushed foaming along.

The walls of the canyon were too precipitous to climb, so the man walked boldly into the stream and waded along for a hundred yards, when the pass widened into a valley several acres in size, and a lovely fertile spot.

The sides of this basin were very steep and inaccessible, and through the center ran the stream which had found an outlet through the narrow gateway of the canyon.

At the further end of the basin, or valley, was a brush shelter, with a fire smoldering in front of it.

In fact, there was a camp which evidently was not a temporary one.

About the basin were visible two horses and three mules, feeding upon the rich grass, and they looked in splendid condition.

The little camp had a raised bed of small saplings, on which were several blankets, and the shelter kept off both rain and wind, while a fire in front served for warmth and cooking as well.

Returning to his camp, just as darkness fell, the man sat down and began to cook his supper.

This dispatched, he set to work looking at his firearms, and this occupied him until several hours of the night had passed away.

Then he arose, buckled on his belt of arms, swung his rifle at his back, threw a couple of fresh logs upon the fire and left his little camp.

Back through the stream he went, down the canyon, and then out into the timber.

He made his way directly toward the camp of Crockett, and the darkness did not appear to

retard his steps, for he seemed well acquainted with the locality.

As he reached the mouth of the ravine in which Crockett had camped, he heard the deep bark of a dog.

Then a man's voice spoke to the brute and the barking ceased, but the dog kept up a little growling.

Up the ravine crept the man, who was going to Crockett's camp with apparently evil intent, and presently he came in sight of the camp.

A fire burned low, but its flickering rays revealed the tent.

He also saw that the dog was chained near, and in the background were two horses.

He made a sound like the yelp of a wolf, and the occupant of the little tent peered out, as though to penetrate the darkness.

"What is it, Gambler?" he asked of the dog, and, as though encouraged, the brute growled savagely. Instinct told him there was danger to his master.

As the man in the tent peered out, a rifle cracked, a deep groan followed, and an angry bark came from the dog.

The firelight revealed Crockett upon his face, as he had fallen, and, feeling that he was harmless, the assassin walked boldly forward and approached the camp.

The dog sprung angrily toward him as he approached; but the man did not appear to notice him other than to sternly command him to "down!" at which the brute, as if suddenly awed, crouched down at his feet.

Unheeding the dog, large and fierce-looking though he was, the assassin knelt by the side of his victim.

"He is dead, and thus is buried the secret which he alone held."

"As for Thunder and his braves, I care nothing, for red-skins tell no tales to criminate themselves."

"Now to get this man's gold, and then I will make my way to other scenes and live a different life."

"I am tired of this existence, and I have gold enough now to make me comfortable at least."

So saying, the man whom the reader has ere this recognized doubtless as Kent Kingdon, the Card King, broke up the little camp, packed up the traps and put them on Crockett's pack-horse and then sought the tree where the treasure had been concealed.

This he threw down upon the ground, and then, mounting the horse of his victim, he led the pack-horse, called the dog to follow him and rode away, leaving the dead body of Crockett lying unburied to become food for wolves and vultures.

He returned at once to his own retreat, broke camp, and with his fortune with him, in gold-dust and stock, started off through the night to find a new scene in which to live his guilty, crime-stained life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SURGEON POWELL RECEIVES A LETTER.

SURGEON FRANK POWELL sat in his comfortable quarters in the fort where he was stationed.

There were other surgeons at the fort, and it was the habit of Frank Powell to let them do the ordinary routine of work, while he devoted much of his time to scouting.

This duty the colonel commanding was very glad to have him do, for no one else at the fort was so well able to trail an Indian or a road-agent, or understood the country half so well.

The Surgeon Scout, as he was called by the soldiers, or White Beaver, the Magic Medicine Man, as the Indians had named him, had been the boon comrade of the famous scout Buffalo Bill, and was noted far and wide as a most daring man and skilled plainsman, while as a surgeon and physician he was also famous.

But Frank Powell loved the wild life on the plains, and he devoted his leisure time to scouting, and no man was more dreaded by Indians and evil-doers than he was.

Now, as he sat in his quarters, it was some months after his meeting with Crockett and the burying of the slain miners.

He had pursued the red-skins, brought them to bay, and, in spite of his small force had caused them to desert some of the mules and horses of the miners and leave several of their warriors upon the field.

Then the winter had come on, and it was with the coming of spring that he was again preparing for the war-trail, when one day the Overland stage-coach, which stopped at the fort, left a letter for him.

The letter was as follows:

"NEW YORK, March 15, 18—.

"To Surgeon Frank Powell, Fort—, Nebraska:—

"RESPECTED SIR:—I know that you will pardon a stranger addressing you, when you know that it is in a just cause.

"I know you well by reputation, and you once cared for a particular friend of mine who died in the West.

"I refer to Mrs. Donald King, as you knew her, and better known as the Diamond Queen.

"You stopped at the Pilgrim's Roost Hotel, in Sunset City, just after her desertion by her husband, known as the Card King, and where she was dying.

"I followed your departure only a few hours, and nursed her until her death, some weeks after, and into my hands she placed the settlement of her affairs, and I have fulfilled my promise to her, I am glad to say.

"At the time of my visit to the West, I was on the trail of this very man, Donald King, who had committed a crime in the East and then escaped the gallows.

"I had followed his grave-marked trail for a long, long time, picking up the threads of his cruel, criminal life, until I could weave all together into a rope to hang him with.

"He had, as you know, escaped from Sunset City, and his wife was deserted and left to die, at the time of your arrival.

"Determined to care for the poor dying woman I sent an ally, a comrade, who also had cause of revenge against the Card King, to hunt him down, and bring back word to me.

"Well, poor Isabel, the Queen of Diamonds, died and was buried, and I was forced to await the return of my comrade.

"At last he arrived and made known his story, to the effect that he had found the Card King in a mine in New Mexico, about to start with a party of miners, who having gained their little fortunes, were going to return to their homes, striking the Overland Stage Trail, at a point not very far from the fort where you were then stationed.

"To find out just where this man was going, my comrade, by name Crockett, joined the miners' outfit and went with them.

"He reported to me that, at a canyon in the mountains, known as Dead Man's Pass, they were ambushed by Ute Indians, and all but himself were massacred.

"He escaped, so he said, by being some distance in the rear.

"He returned to the scene, after the red-skins had left, and at once started for the fort to report the affair, and met you and a party of cavalry.

"You visited the spot, with your men, buried the bodies, and then started on the trail of the Indians, while he returned to me.

"I wished proof of all he said, for I have become suspicious in my nature of late years, and the result was that I secured an escort, and with Crockett as guide started for the Dead Man's Pass.

"I saw the graves, had the body exhumed from the one marked Donald King, and believe it to have been that of the Card King, especially as Crockett showed me a ring covered with dirt, which I knew the gambler had worn, and which my guide told me was taken from the left little finger of the corpse.

"Believing that my man had escaped the gallows, through the attack of the red-skins, I buried my revenge in the grave with him and came East.

"After attending to the affair of poor Isabel, the Diamond Queen, I met one day, not very long since, a miner whom I had known in the West.

"He had struck it rich, and was returning home to enjoy his hard-earned wealth.

"In conversation with this man he told me that he had lately seen the Card King.

"He told me more, that Crockett, whom he knew, he had seen at the Card King's cabin, before the miners started on their fatal trip, and that my comrade had not gone with them, but had followed their trail, as he had seen him dogging it.

"When he saw the Card King he was in a wild region, and they had met on the trail, and had camped together, but Donald King had pretended not to know him, and had said that he was not the Card King.

"Also he told me that he had recognized not only the Card King's horse, but several other animals, for he had four horses and three mules with him.

"One of these horses was the animal which Crockett had ridden to the mines in New Mexico and the man also had my guide's weapons.

"Knowing the desperate character of the Card King, my informant, who had only one companion with him, made no accusations against him, but he felt certain that it was Donald King, and that he had killed Crockett and gotten his traps, horses and weapons.

"The next morning they parted, the miner and his friend going on their way, while the Card King took another trail; but he noticed before parting with him, that he carried some bags, evidently full of gold-dust.

"Now, Surgeon Powell, this proves to me that the Card King yet lives, and if so there is no rest for me.

"I have vowed to hunt him to his death, and I shall do so; but I wish proof that the body in the grave in Dead Man's Pass is, or is not, that of Donald King.

"You are a surgeon, skilled in anatomy, and can find out for me by exhuming the remains.

"The man I refer to can be recognized by the following:

- "Height, 6 feet.
- "Weight, 185 lbs.
- "Hands small, wearing No. 7 gloves.
- "Feet small, wearing No. 5 shoe.

"Left arm broken between elbow and shoulder.

"Bullet-wound in left hand, shattering bones of third and little finger.

"A wound in head, right side, over temple, made by Indian arrow.

"The inclosed is a lock of his hair, given to me some two years ago.

"With this information I am sure you can find out if the remains in the grave are those of Donald King.

"I might add that he was proud of the fact that his teeth were perfect, and he had never had to have one pulled.

"As you may be to expense in getting men to exhumate the body, I send a New York draft for two hundred dollars, which please use as you deem best.

"Kindly let me hear from you at your earliest convenience, and thanking you for all the trouble I give you, believe me,

"Yours with respect,
"SHADOWER."

"Care of
"MESSRS. LOCKWOOD & LOCKWOOD,
"Attorneys-at-Law,
"No. — Broadway,
"New York, N. Y."

Such was the letter which Surgeon Powell received from an unknown correspondent. Needless to say—it set him to thinking!

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SOLDIER DETECTIVE.

THE idea that his correspondent was a woman did flash into the mind of Surgeon Powell for an instant, but he quickly dismissed it.

The writing was by no means feminine, but bold and large.

Just as he had read the letter for a second time, and glanced over the draft, as though it might give him a clew, a young officer entered the quarters of the surgeon.

"Ah, Cameron, I am glad to see you," and the surgeon greeted his visitor in a most friendly manner, for the two were the closest friends.

Lieutenant Carter Cameron was a late graduate from West Point, and was undergoing his first service on the frontier.

He was a handsome fellow, had stood among the first dozen in his class, had been popular with brother cadets and professors alike, and was a dashing, brave man whom all predicted would win his spurs before long.

Though years the junior of the surgeon, a strong friendship had sprung up between them, and Powell had heard from the young officer much of his past life, how his sister and himself had been left orphans at an early age, and she, in later years had loved a man who had been slain in a duel, and brooding over her sorrow had taken her own life.

The act of his sister had cast a gloom over the young officer's life, though he never afflicted others with his sorrows.

"Cameron, I am glad to see you, for I wish to show you a remarkable letter I have just received, and also consult you about it, for well I know your sound counsel in a matter where judgment is needed."

"You flatter me, my dear surgeon; but what is it?"

"First read this letter."

"My God! whose writing is this?" cried the young officer.

"That I do not know, for he simply signs himself 'Shadower'."

"Ah! but the writing seems familiar to me, yet, I cannot, for the life of me, now recall where I have seen its counterpart."

"It is a fancied resemblance," and Carter Cameron read the letter from beginning to end.

"This is strange; but did such things happen?"

"Yes, as far as my visiting the dying woman known as the Diamond Queen, and also meeting the man Crockett on the plains, and going with him to bury the dead miners."

"This letter gives you a good description of the dead man."

"It could not be more accurate, I assure you. I shall open each grave; but I wish you to help me out in it, Cameron."

"Surely I will."

"I will go to Sunset City alone, and discover who the writer is, by finding out who it was who nursed the dying Diamond Queen."

"Then I shall ascertain all I can about this man Crockett, after he left the Shadower, as my correspondent signs himself, and I will come on from there to Dead Man's Pass and join you there just ten days from now, while you had better take with you a dozen cavalrymen and start in a couple of days."

"I am wholly at your service, Surgeon Powell, with the permission, of course, of the colonel," answered Lieutenant Cameron.

The colonel readily gave the desired permis-

sion, for he knew that when Surgeon Powell undertook anything success was pretty sure to be the result, and he had been told the entire situation of affairs.

Two hours after the Surgeon Scout rode away from the fort alone. He was well mounted and armed, and took the trail that would lead him by the most direct way to Sunset City.

As he reached that delectable spot, and rode up to the Pilgrim's Roost, he was at once recognized by Landlord English and warmly welcomed.

"Back again, sir?"

"Yes, landlord."

"Glad to see you, sir."

"Thank you; but I am here for a short stay."

"By the way, what of the unfortunate lady who was ill when last I was here?"

"Ah! sir, you predicted well, she is dead."

"Did none of her friends come to see her, nor her husband return?"

"Not he, sir, he was too bad a man at heart for that; but soon after you left her brother arrived."

"Her brother?"

"Yes, a handsome young fellow, almost a boy, in fact."

"And he came here alone?"

"No, sir, he had a rough-looking fellow with him, a guide, or pard, though they were little alike."

"And they cared for the poor lady?"

"The brother did, sir, for he devoted himself to her day and night; but he sent the man off somewhere, and he did not return until long after the Queen's death."

"And then?"

"The young brother then went off with his pard, and a few others, and was gone a week. Upon their return the young fellow took his sister's traps and started east by stage over the Overland, and I have not seen him since."

"And his pard?"

"Knocked about for awhile and then started off for the mines somewhere, he said."

"What was the fellow's name?"

"Crockett, he called himself."

"And he has not been seen in these parts since?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I'll get you to take care of me, landlord, for the night at least."

"I will, sir, and you shall have the room the Diamond Queen died in," answered the landlord, with the air of a man who felt that he was conferring a favor in the choice of rooms.

"This man is the one that Shadower's letter refers to."

"I must find out more, if I can," muttered the Surgeon Scout, as he got the direction of where was the grave of the Diamond Queen from the landlord, and wended his way in that direction.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SURGEON SCOUT WRITES A LETTER.

SOME three weeks after his reception of the letter from his unknown correspondent in New York, the Soldier Detective, as Lieutenant Carter Cameron laughingly called Surgeon Powell, was again seated in his quarters at the fort.

He had returned from his detective work, and, having gotten rested, had written a letter to Shadower.

Sending his orderly to ask Lieutenant Cameron to join him, he said, when that officer arrived:

"I have written to Shadower, Cameron, and I wish you to hear my letter, for it must go by the stage to-morrow."

"I will gladly hear it, Surgeon Powell," was the answer, and, having settled themselves comfortably, Surgeon Powell began to read aloud.

His letter was as follows:

"FORT NEBRASKA.
"May 5th 18—."

"TO SHADOWER, care of Lockwood and Lockwood:—
"DEAR SIR:—As I wrote you a line, upon the receipt of your letter of March 15th, that I would discover all in my power that you wished, regarding the man you referred to, I now write to say that I returned last night from my trail, and beg to submit the following:

"I went myself to Sunset City, and from the landlord of the Pilgrim's Roost learned all that I could regarding the man Crockett."

"I discovered that he left Sunset City, well-mounted upon a fine horse which he had purchased, and making the animal he had before ridden serve as a pack-horse."

"It was supposed that he took the trail that would lead him in the direction of Dead Man's Pass."

"Before starting upon this trip, I secured the services of a brother officer, Lieutenant Cam-

eron, who went with a dozen cavalymen to Dead Man's Pass to meet me there.

"Arriving there I discovered that the lieutenant had been several days in the canyon, and in scouting about had discovered the remains of a camp which had evidently been occupied for some time, for the trees near it had been drawn heavily upon for wood to burn.

"The graves of the dead miners remained as you doubtless had left them, and I had the one marked Donald King opened and the body removed.

"Of course the skeleton only remained; but that was better for my purpose.

"The measurement of the skeleton I found to be that, as close as I could calculate, under six feet, say about five feet ten.

"The feet and hands were by no means as small as you described, and the man must have worn a No. 8 glove and fully a No. 7 shoe.

"His weight could not have been over a hundred and seventy pounds.

"Then there was a break in the bone of the right arm, and not the left, as you described, and this was between the wrist and the elbow.

"There was no wound in the left hand, or if so it had not touched the bones, and there was no scar upon the skull from an Indian arrow.

"Again, the man's teeth were in bad condition and a number of them had been filled.

"As for the hair found in the grave, it was not from the same head as that you sent, for it was coarse, though of about the same shade.

"With these facts before me I arrived at the conclusion that the body in the grave was not that of the Card King.

"I then had the other graves opened, but not one of them revealed a form such as you describe.

"The conclusion that Lieutenant Cameron and myself then came to was that the Card King, for some reason known to himself, had pretended a deception.

"He had wished to be thought dead, and he could have but one to aid him in the deceit.

"Could he not have bought off your man Crockett, and, not knowing his wife was dead, let him go back to report him dead?

"If Crockett was with the miners, at the time of the massacre, then he escaped, as he said, and Donald King also made his escape at the same time.

"The Card King might have gone into the camp, of which I have spoken, and then awaited Crockett's return from Sunset City, and I believe that such was the case.

"But the Card King, in my opinion, wished to destroy all who might know that he was yet living, and I believe that he killed the man Crockett.

"My idea is that the Indians did not take the gold, but that Donald King did.

"Not very far from the Dead Man's Pass, I found another camp.

"The occupant had not remained very long; but there were the remains of a fire, and more, the bones of a man were found there, and a bullet wound was in his head.

"The man had evidently been shot there in camp, and the wolves had devoured him.

"Near the camp I found a part of his clothing, and in a pocket was found a leather wallet with some letters.

"Though much defaced I read the name in the letters, and it was:

"BELDEN CROCKETT."

"It was addressed to the Pilgrim's Roost, and was from some pard in a mining-camp in Colorado.

"This convinced me that the dead man was your man Crockett, and, going to the camp found by Lieutenant Cameron, I discovered, where it had been dropped, a small Derringer pistol, silver-mounted, and engraved upon it was the name:

"THE CARD KING."

"This proved to my mind who had been the occupant of that lone camp for weeks, and that he had, for reasons of his own, awaited the return of Crockett to kill him.

"My conclusions, therefore, my dear sir, and Lieutenant Cameron concurs with me, are that the Card King is yet alive; but where to look for him is wholly a matter of conjecture.

"If you decide to take his trail again, I will be more than glad to do all in my power for you, and you have but to command me.

"As we were but in the discharge of our duty, endeavoring to unearth border villainy, there was no expense incurred, so I return you your draft.

"You know my address if you need my services again.

With respect.

FRANK POWELL.

Surgeon U. S. Army."

CHAPTER XXI.

AGAIN ON THE TRAIL.

THOUGH the Surgeon Scout had believed that his correspondent in New York was a man, the reader knows that it was Camille Cameron, the Beautiful Shadower.

Believing that Kent Kingdon was really dead, she was willing to lead a different life, until suddenly she had it come to her that the Card King was yet alive.

Then it was that she determined to once more dog the man, and follow him to his death on the gallows, to keep her vow.

So she wrote first to Surgeon Powell, for she was sick of the wild life she had been forced to lead.

She wished to be certain of the fact that Kent Kingdon lived before she made a move.

If the remains in the grave did not answer her description of him, then Kent Kingdon certainly lived.

The letter of the Soldier Detective she grasped with trembling hand, as she recognized his writing, from his former note telling her that he would do as she requested.

She broke open the bulky envelope, and nervously herself to know the worst, sat down to read the letter.

Slowly she read it through, and then said:

"Kent Kingdon yet lives.

"I am convinced that he does, and this noble surgeon has done well.

"Could that man Crockett after all have been a spy on me?

"Could he have been Kent Kingdon's spy?

"One would so believe after all I now know.

"Well, he met his end promptly at the hands of his master, that is certain, and it was just like Kent Kingdon to kill him when he had used him to the end.

"Ah me! what memories rush upon me when I hear that my dear, noble brother was with the Surgeon Scout upon this expedition.

"Poor Carter, he has mourned me dead, has believed that I committed suicide, and, just as I was about to write him, to confess all to him, and ask him to shield my act, my trail of a Nemesis from all others, I learned that the man whom I have tracked so long is not after all dead.

"Well, I have nothing else to do but to again take the trail.

"I registered my vow to follow Kent Kingdon to his death—yes, registered the vow at the grave of Horace Manners, the man he killed, the one I so madly loved.

"That vow shall not be broken, for Kent Kingdon, alias Don, the Card King, alias Donald King, alias the Gambler King, miner, or whatever he may deem himself, must be brought to judgment.

She had mused aloud, and her face was pale, her eyes flashed as she spoke.

For a long time she sat there in her room, clutching the letter of the Surgeon Scout in her hands, and it was midnight before she aroused herself to action.

Several days passed in her preparations, and then, one evening, she left New York for the far West.

Going as far as possible by rail, she then took the Overland stage-coach to a distant station, and one afternoon, again in male attire, well mounted, equipped and armed, she once more took the trail of Kent Kingdon, the Card King.

She had decided to go over the same trail she had once followed, from the scene of his first career in the Northern mining-camps.

The summer passed, winter came on, and she was obliged to come to a halt.

But she provided well for the long, dreary days, made herself as comfortable as possible in winter quarters in a frontier outpost, had her guitar, books and sketching to amuse her, while she practiced daily with her rifle and revolver.

With the first coming of spring she was once more upon the trail.

From place to place she went, making all inquiries, hunting persistently, and striving to find out if Kent Kingdon had again dared to go over the grave-dotted trail he had left behind him.

Here and there she would hear of men who answered his description, and she would look them up, only to meet with disappointment.

And so the days passed, weeks came, and one pleasant afternoon she rode up to the door of the Pilgrim's Roost, her well-trained pack-horse following close behind her.

Landlord English sprung to his feet in amazement, and with a look of pleasure upon his face.

"Young pard, I'm delighted!

"I never expected to see you in these parts again," he said, as he wrung the hand of the disguised woman.

"Yes, I thought I would come this way again, Pard English."

"Wanted to see the grave of your poor sister, I guess?"

"Yes."

"Well, you'll find it has not been forgotten, for the boys have planted wild flowers about it, and no weed is ever allowed to grow there.

"We all love the memory of the unhappy Diamond Queen as much as we hate the Card King."

"Any news of him by the way?"

"The Card King?"

"Yes."

"No more than that he has never been seen since he left here."

"Any news of old Pard Crockett?"

"None, except that he left here soon after you did, and lighted out for other parts."

"No one then has seen or heard of the Card King or Crockett since?"

"Not one that I have heard of, and I'd be likely to hear."

"Why the Surgeon Scout, that handsome, dashing army doctor was here last year looking for Crockett?"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, but I could give him no information about him, so he left; but he went to the Diamond Queen's grave."

"Well, I'll be with you a day or two, landlord, so do the best you can for me."

"I'll give you the Diamond Queen's room, if not afraid to stay there, for the boys are, as they say it is haunted."

"I will take the room, for I have no fear of spirits," was the reply.

That evening, just before sunset, Camille Cameron walked away from the Pilgrim's Roost and wended her way toward the grave of poor Isabel.

The spot was a pretty one, and the miners indeed had cared for the lonely grave, for flowers grew about there in abundance.

Then there were a number of names cut in the trees near, and the spot was held sacred by the rough denizens of Sunset City.

The tears welled up into the brave eyes of the disguised woman as she gazed down upon the little mound, covered with wild flowers, and she said earnestly:

"Here again, above this sacred mound, do I vow to bring Kent Kingdon to his death."

"He shall not escape me."

CHAPTER XXII.

A PRISONER.

"HANDS up or die!"

The words rung out in a threatening tone, and with a firmness that showed that the speaker was master of the situation.

They were addressed to a horseman who was slowly winding along a trail.

The order, so sternly given, was promptly obeyed, as though the rider had had some experience with frontier traveling and knew just what to do in an emergency.

Then came the query in a remarkably cool voice for one thus situated:

"Well, who is it that holds me up, and what do you want?"

"Don't be sassy, youngster, for we don't like it."

"Jist git down off that horse and let us see what you kin pan out."

As he spoke the man for the first time stepped into view from behind a huge boulder on the mountain trail.

"I'll give up all I have without dismounting, for there is no need to kick against it," was the reply.

"You can't do that, for we wants your horse too, and besides, you has got to remain a prisoner until the captain has a little chin music with you."

"All right," and the rider dismounted.

"Waal, you is a lovely specimen for far out in this country and no mistake."

"What is you doing here?"

"Looking for some friends who have settled on the border here."

"Ah! waal, when you find 'em you'll have to get 'em to fit yer cut, for we wants yer horse, weepins and all you has valuable."

"Say, pards, show yerselves."

As the man spoke several rough-looking fellows came out from behind the rocks, and a look of intense disappointment flashed over the face of the prisoner, who had evidently meditated an attempt to escape, if the man had been alone.

"Search him, pards."

"You need not search me, for I'll give you all I have," and the prisoner quickly gave up his weapons, and emptied his pockets, while he said:

"Where is your captain?"

"Why?"

"Because I wish to be allowed to go on my way on foot, unless you intend to kill me."

"We kills when we has to do it; but our cap'n hain't here, and if he were yer needn't spect no marcy from him, for he are a devil, if he do look like an angel."

"Ah! what is his name?"

"Now, thet are none o' your business."

"What kind of a looking man is he?"

"Han'some as a pictur', and devilish as the devil."

"Describe him."

"Is you a detective o' ther Government a-lookin' up criminals, and thinks he may be a man you is arter, for I guesses he hasn't been just altogether good whar he come from."

"No, I am, as I told you, looking for some one who came West long ago, and whom I hope to find."

"Will you not let me go now?"

"No, you must go to camp with us, soon as ther stage have come along— Hark!"

"Pards, the old bearse are coming, so take the young feller back into the bushes, and if he squeals just knife him."

Two men seized hold of the prisoner and dragged him back into the timber.

He saw that there were several more men there, and they quickly seized his horse and muzzled him, so that he would not neigh.

Then all waited in silence, while louder and louder sounded the rumbling of the wheels over the rocky road.

Nearer and nearer drew the coach, and the prisoner looked as though he would have given much to have cried out and given the alarm.

But he knew that to do so would sound his death-knell, and he wisely kept quiet.

Nearer and nearer drew the coach, and then suddenly rung out the deep voice of the man who had brought him to a halt.

"Halt that bearse!"

"Hands up all, or die!"

But though the coach came to a halt, and the road-agents sprung out from their place of concealment, there was a surprise in store for them, as suddenly there came a volley of musketry, and the ringing order in a commanding voice:

"Out, men, and fight them!"

"Soldiers! soldiers!" yelled the road-agents in terror, and the two men who were standing by the prisoner sprung away to aid their comrades.

Then the young prisoner saw his chance.

All that he had been robbed of lay at his feet in a blanket, to be carried intact, the robbers had said, to their chief, who was not with the party.

Quick as a flash he seized the blanket with its burden, threw it over his shoulder, and in ten seconds time had sprung into his saddle and was dashing away through the timber.

His going was not noticed, and he rode recklessly over ground that threatened death should his horse trip and fall.

Behind him he heard the shots of the combatants, and then came ringing cheers, and he knew that they came from the soldiers.

The road-agents had caught a Tartar in that stage-coach, and they got lead and steel instead of gold and silver.

Away sped the young rider, and rein was not drawn until miles had been passed over.

Then a halt was made and the fugitive said, aloud:

"Well, it was a clever escape, after all."

"Now I am free to once more take the trail of Kent Kingdon."

The young rider was Camille Cameron the Beautiful Shadower.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

SURGEON FRANK POWELL had hit pretty near the truth, in his letter to the Beautiful Shadower, regarding the acts and motives of Kent Kingdon.

That reckless and desperate man, always cool, even courteous, but feeling that the hand of his fellow-man was ever against him, had decided to live a changed life.

He had, to commence with, taken the life, as has been seen, of Crockett, recovered his gold, horses and traps and then started forth to seek new fields in which to dwell.

Continuing on his way, the Card King had headed for a part of the country distant from the mines.

Amid new scenes and different associates he could dwell in peace, he hoped.

There was a valley into which settlers were coming, and a number of ranches were scattered about over many miles of territory.

The settlers had been of a better class than usual, and had built substantial log-cabin houses, purchased cattle, and were prospering.

Among those he would go and seek his home.

With his horses and mules, his stolen, crime-stained treasure, and complete outfit, the Card King, a fugitive from all who had known him, made his way through the wild country.

He knew his danger from roving bands of In-

dians, or perhaps a party of road-agents, but he felt capable of taking care of himself against ordinary odds.

He had been born and reared in Texas, and when a mere boy had been famous among his fellows for his skill as a prairieman, so that he knew just how to find his way through the pathless plains and mountains.

At length he began to draw near to the valley for which he was aiming.

He meant to seek some little settlement, and state that he had been attacked by red-skins, and his two comrades had been slain, while he, with their horses and the outfit, had escaped.

Furthermore, he would tell how they were successful miners, and had been seeking a spot to settle and turn cattle-raisers.

One afternoon he went into camp early.

He was always most particular in the selection of a camping-place, and, perhaps from prementiment on this occasion, was particularly so.

He happened to see a hill, which was penetrated by a canyon, or ravine.

The hill rose like a cone from the surrounding land, was some sixty feet in height, rocky, and the summit was crowned with a thicket of close-growing trees.

It appeared to be the crater of a volcano, and the ravine had doubtless been the outlet for the molten lava which had poured down the valley many long centuries before in some grand revolution of nature.

Going up the narrow canyon, the Card King discovered a bowl-like space inside the hill, and there he found grass in plenty, wood, and a spring bubbling out of the rocks and filling a small basin which seemed to have no outlet, for the water never ran over, and yet must have had a subterranean way of egress.

The horses and mules were at once turned loose, and reveled in their freedom and the grass about them.

Lariats were stretched across the ravine to bar their way, a fire was built of the wood scattered about, and which had fallen from the trees growing in the basin.

The place had evidently often been used before by some one as a camping-place, for there were the remains of half a dozen fires, and the tracks about the spring showed that buffalo, deer, bear and wolves came there for water.

"This place is a good one for a fort," muttered the Card King, and seizing his rifle, he dropped a fine buck that had stopped at the lariat barrier across the ravine, as though astonished at the obstruction.

An early supper of venison steaks, bacon broiled on the coals, and coffee having been dispatched, the Card King climbed up the rocks to have a view from the summit.

He obtained an extensive survey of the country about him, and was so wrapt in the contemplation of the scenery that he did not notice a party of horsemen coming toward the hill until they were very near.

They had evidently seen him sometime before; but, as they saw him throw his rifle to his shoulder, they drew rein and one of them called out:

"Don't fire! we are friends."

There were nine men in the party.

Their horses were all matchless animals and they were equipped with Mexican saddles and bridles.

Their riders wore dark suits, top-boots and broad-brimmed sombreros, while they fairly bristled with firearms.

"Who are you?" called out the Card King.

"Friends, I said."

"No man is a friend in this country until he proves himself so."

"Well, to be frank with you, we are Tax-gatherers of the Overland, and you must pay toll."

These words threw off the mask, and Kent Kingdon knew that he had to deal with road-agents.

"How many of you are there?" called out the man who appeared to be chief.

"Enough to give you more lead than gold if you wish to try to collect gold," was the reply.

The men had been following his trail, and they had seen that there were the tracks of over half a dozen animals.

They did not think that one man had all of them, and they set it down that the horses were mounted and the mules carried packs.

So they were a little cautious.

"You had better submit quietly, for if you and your pards resist us, we will show you no mercy," said the chief.

"Wait until I ask for mercy," was the stern reply, and the words followed:

"I hold this fort, and if you want me and my

belongings, you have got to fight for it, that is all," and as the Card King spoke he disappeared from the top of the hill.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TOLL-TAKERS OF THE TRAIL.

THE act of the Card King was a surprise to the Toll-takers.

They knew the hill well, for often had they camped there.

The sides were steep, free from trees and very rugged, so that a horse could not be led up to the top.

The summit was protected by rocks and trees, and the space so small that a few men stationed there could keep off a hundred.

Then from any point on the top the base and sides of the hill could be commanded.

To charge into the canyon would be, they supposed, met with a volley that would empty half their saddles.

So they entered into a discussion as to the best plan to pursue.

In the mean time Kent Kingdon had sprung rapidly down the inner sides of the hill, and seizing the rifle and pistols of Crockett, along with his own and ample ammunition, he grasped what food he could and a canteen of water and was back at the summit of the hill in five minutes.

He had prepared to stand a siege.

As he had expected and taken chances accordingly, he saw that the Toll-gatherers were still where he had last seen them.

They had not yet agreed upon a plan of action.

"Why don't you charge the fort?" he called out in a sneering tone.

The leader at once replied:

"Surrender, and we will spare your life; refuse and we will show you no mercy."

"I have asked for none."

"We can take you."

"Talk is cheap, act!" was the contemptuous reply.

"How many of you are there?"

"Enough to stand you off."

"I do not believe it."

The bold defiance of the Card King convinced the men that he had able support, and they were in a quandary.

"Hello!"

Kent Kingdon suddenly called out the word.

He knew that the end could but be against him, and seeing the band of outlaws a sudden idea crossed his mind.

"Well?"

"I'd like to join your band."

"With your men?"

"Yes."

"On what terms?"

"Well, to be governed by your rules, of course, and to chip in out of my outfit to aid the band."

"You do not mean trickery?"

"No, I mean business."

"Prove it."

"Well, I wish to be chief."

"You!"

"Yes, why not?"

"I am chief."

"You are no good, or you would not have started to parley, but at once come on and had it out. You haven't got the grit."

This so infuriated the chief that he at once called to his comrades to follow him.

They did so, and the party came on at a rush for the entrance to the canyon, while a volley of rifle-balls came pattering about the Card King.

He was unhurt, and coolly raised his repeating rifle, and with the crack a horse fell, throwing his rider.

Another shot brought down a second horse, but the rider was on his feet and running toward the canyon.

The horsemen were not checked, and the Card King said coolly:

"I must take human life to stop them, and spare horse-flesh."

Then two shots rung out quickly, and as many men fell dead.

The Toll-takers wheeled, as if by command and rode for their lives out of range of the fatal rifle.

There they halted.

Two horses and two men dead, and animals and human beings shot through the head.

But one man had fired, and he seemed to throw no shot away.

"The Toll-takers were astonished."

"Ho, pards, what made you turn back?" called out Kent Kingdon in mocking tones.

No reply came, and he continued:

"I gave you a hint of what was coming when I shot your horses but you did not take it."

"Had you come on I would have had to kill you all."

The Toll-takers felt very sore over their repulse.

But one man confronted them, but they were sure that there were others.

"You had better agree to my terms," the Card King called out.

The Toll-takers talked earnestly together, and feeling that if there were four men in the hill, as they surmised, they were upon more equal terms since two of their number were dead, they concluded to come to terms, if those offered were satisfactory.

"What terms do you offer?" called out the leader.

"I am no man to play second fiddle to anyone, so I must be chief, and to prove I am equal to it, I challenge you to fight or defend it. Do you dare accept my challenge?"

The leader of the Toll-takers was fairly stunned with the bold offer.

He glanced upon his men.

Their faces showed that they expected him to accept the challenge.

In that wild land pluck was paramount to anything.

"Well, if I fall, what then?" he called out, as he saw that the men expected no back-down in him.

"Why, I will be chief!"

"And your men?"

"All here will accept the situation."

"If I kill you?"

"Then you win the game, and what is mine goes to you?"

"And your men?"

"There is not a man here who will go contrary to my wishes."

"All right, when shall we fight?"

"The sun is yet half an hour high, so let it be now, and we can camp in peace together when it is over."

"How shall we fight?"

"I will ride out of the canyon, and you stand two hundred yards away."

"When you see me coming towards you, spur towards me, as I will towards you, and open with your revolver, whenever you see fit."

"Do the terms suit you?"

"Yes," was the reply of the leader of the Toll-takers.

CHAPTER XXV.

A DUEL FOR LEADERSHIP.

THE moment that the leader of the Toll-takers agreed to the terms of Kent Kingdon, the latter turned and hailed, as though calling to some one in the valley:

"Ho, Tom! come up here and stand guard!" the horsemen heard him say.

Then he disappeared from their view, and they thought certainly that another man had taken his place on the hill-top, though he kept out of sight.

Down the hillside then went the Card King; his best horse was caught, saddled and bridled, and looking to his revolvers, while he strapped his repeating-rifle to the saddle ready for use, he rode toward the canyon.

He took down the lariats and did not replace them, in case he should retreat in haste, and, a moment after, halted at the mouth of the canyon.

The sun was near the horizon, but there was yet plenty of light, and he saw the bodies of the two men and horses which he had killed.

Settling himself well in his saddle, grasping firmly his reins, and with his revolver in his right hand, the Card King suddenly spurred out of the canyon to meet the leader of the Toll-takers in the duel on horseback for life or death.

A cry came from the road-agents as they saw him, and their leader at once spurred forward to meet his adversary.

The road-agent was a large man, wearing a heavy beard, long hair and very broad sombrero.

He sat well in his saddle, had a bold, cruel look in his eyes, and dashed toward his adversary with the air of a man who felt that the chances were upon his side, and he meant to show no mercy.

Nearer and nearer the two splendid horses drew to each other, each running well, and, as they were within two hundred feet, the Toll-taker raised his revolver and fired.

At the same moment the horse of the Card King felt the spurs and sprang high over the body of one of the slain animals that lay in his path.

That leap saved the life of the gallant horse,

for the bullet of the Toll-taker went wide of its aim.

As the hoofs of his horse touched the ground, the Card King fired, and the head of the Toll-taker's steed stopped the bullet.

Active as a cat the man caught on his feet, while his horse rolled over dead, but, losing no time the outlaw chief rushed toward his enemy.

But Kingdon, wishing to reduce the size of the target, had thrown himself from his horse, as the other animal went down, and was also on foot to meet his adversary.

The Toll-taker ran swiftly toward his enemy, while Kingdon walked leisurely.

The former fired several shots in rapid succession, and the latter but one.

The shots of the road-agent were well aimed, remarkably well for a man who was running upon a foe and firing as he ran, for one passed through the hat of the Card King and another cut through his right arm.

The shock caused him to drop his revolver, but a second was quickly drawn from his belt with his left hand, and the Card King fired his second shot to the Toll-taker's four.

But, the second was a fatal one, for, though wounded, and firing with his left hand, Kingdon sent his bullet into the brain of his enemy, striking the head directly between the eyes!

Down dropped the Toll-taker, while a call brought the horse of the Card King to his side and then came the words:

"Is it peace, pards, or war? Talk quick!"

"It's peace, pard, and you has won, well," cried one of the robbers, and they advanced toward Kingdon.

Ever suspicious, never caught off his guard, Kent watched their approach, as he stood by the side of his horse.

"You accept the situation, gentlemen?" he called out.

"We do," came in a chorus of voices.

"I am your leader?"

"Yes."

"Then come in and get acquainted with my boys."

"There's no trap, then?" and the men halted a few paces from the bold man.

"None. But, as you doubt me, I will remain here with you, while one of your number goes to my camp. If harm befalls him, just kill me."

"I'll risk it and go," said one.

So it was agreed, and the man walked boldly forward.

They saw him enter the cabin, and in a short while he came out again laughing loudly.

"Pards, come on, fer we is a set o' durned fools," he called out, and again he laughed.

"What's he laughing about, captain?" asked one.

"Because he's amused, as you will be," was the reply.

Together they entered the canyon and glanced about them.

The man who had first gone would say nothing, but left them to find out for themselves just what had appeared so funny to him.

"Where are your men?" asked one.

"What men?"

"Those with you."

"I had no men with me."

"Was you all alone?"

"Yes."

"Waal, you is the slickest one I ever met," and with this all broke forth into a fit of boisterous laughter.

"Gentlemen, this is my camp, and you are welcome."

"Like you, I am a knight of fortune, and was making my way to the settlement to see what I could pick up that was good. My two comrades were killed in a fight with red-skins, and so I am alone with their effects."

"I have some little gold-dust with me, and I think of purchasing, or establishing a ranch."

"Seeing you as Toll-takers, makes me feel desirous of becoming your captain, and I will propose a plan which I think will bring in to all of us a handsome living."

"Do you regret your change in leaders, gentlemen?"

There was something so free and easy, so fascinating about the handsome scamp, that the road-agents were at once won over by him, and to a man they grasped his hand in token of their acceptance of the situation.

"Now, let us bury the dead, for we owe that duty to them, and then, my friends, around the camp-fire, we can see what it is best to do in the future for our mutual interests."

An hour after the party were seated around a cheerful camp-fire discussing the situation, the outlaws more than ever delighted with their

new leader, while he, with no thought of the graves near him, and which his hand had made, wore a pleased, complacent smile, as though at peace with the world.

But this smile was called up by the fact that he had always, when going into camp, hidden his treasure, in case he would have to fly suddenly during the night, that he might come back at another time and claim it.

Excepting a little bag of dust, his gold was then in hiding, and the Toll-takers little dreamed that there was a fair-sized fortune so near them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MASK REMOVED.

IN a most substantial and comfortable log-cabin in the far West, two persons were seated.

The room in which they were was large and comfortable, and there was about it almost an approach to luxury, and, in fact, it was a luxurious home for that wild country.

It was a ranch, with cattle in large droves dotting the valley near by, an extensive vegetable garden, fields of grain, and generally the look of being the home of a well-to-do ranchero.

The ranch had been the home of a physician, one Doctor Manners, who had been overtaken with financial misfortune in the East, and giving up business had removed to the frontier with his family to start life anew.

He had, with his limited means, established a home, and he had prospered beyond his expectations, for his practice had been extensive and had paid him well.

His family had consisted of his wife and a daughter, Mabel, and his son, Horace, just about the time of his father's failure, had been killed in a duel at college, in the East, with a fellow-student.

The death of his son, and the loss of his fortune, had been bitter blows to Doctor Manners, and he was glad to find a hiding-place in the Western wilds.

But, alas! sorrow still dogged his steps, for his daughter Mabel, one day, in danger of her life, was rescued by a young ranchero who had lately settled in the country.

That ranchero was Kent Kingdon, the slayer of Horace Manners.

Saving the one life in a measure atoned for the taking of the other, and the fascinating man was admitted as a visitor to the doctor's home, for no one knew what his past had been.

It was only known, as he said, that he had come West and settled down as a ranchero.

Fascinated by the man, Mabel accepted his love, and when the doctor, hoping to work off the attachment, and having made a fortune in the West, moved to St. Louis, thither Kent Kingdon followed them, and Mabel Manners secretly married the man who had killed her brother.

Both were forgiven, and Kent Kingdon took his bride back to her old home in the West, which her father had given her.

For a time all seemed well, but before the young wife often would rise the ghost of her dead brother.

Then followed cruel treatment, and at last the poor young wife was in despair, for she had found out her husband to be all that was cruel and wicked.

She had found out that during his stay in the valley he had been secretly the leader of the Toll-takers, a band of outlaws who preyed upon the ranches, the Overland coaches and wagon-trains bound West.

In her despair she had written to her father, and he, knowing Surgeon Frank Powell, had placed the matter in his hands, and, with the aid of Lieutenant Carter Cameron, the gallant officer scout had begun his work.

He did not know Kent Kingdon as the Card King, whom he had hoped to find for the Beautiful Shadower; but Carter Cameron knew him as the slayer of his sister's lover, and which deed, as the young officer believed, had driven Camille to take her own life.

But the Beautiful Shadower?

She had not given up her trailing of the Card King.

She had clung to her purpose unceasingly and untiringly, and at last had tracked the man to the valley where he had settled.

She found that he had come in possession of a fine ranch, that his cattle dotted the plains, that he had married the sister of her lover, and she prepared to strike at last and with fearful force.

But he was recognized by Kent Kingdon, in her seeming moment of successful revenge, when she had gone to his home, still in her disguise, and she it was, with the poor young wife

Mabel, that was seated in the room of the Card King's home.

They had been prisoners until a short while before, and then Surgeon Powell, acting upon his letter from Doctor Manners, had visited the ranch and their rescue had been sudden and decided.

But Kent Kingdon was away, and it was though a plot of the Soldier Detective that it was so.

Surgeon Powell meant to make a clean sweep of the Card King and his outlaw band, and so, with the aid of a deserter from the army, whose life he had saved on one occasion, he planned to capture Kent Kingdon and his Toll-takers.

A wagon-train, with a paymaster and his money, was coming westward, and the Toll-takers were to capture it.

But the train was already posted as to what was to be expected, and Lieutenant Cameron and his company of cavalry, were lying in wait to pounce upon the robbers where they attacked the train in a place which was a perfect trap for them to fall into, but was to prove most disadvantageous to the robbers if repulsed.

Such was the situation of affairs, when Kent Kingdon, believed by his neighbors to be an honest ranchero, and recently leader of the Toll-takers, was preparing to attack the train with his masked preservers, while Surgeon Powell and his cavalrymen, under Lieutenant Carter Cameron, were prepared to strike a deadly blow at the outlaws.

And in that room at the cabin home of the Card King, sat Mabel, the unhappy wife, and Camille Cameron, the Beautiful Shadower of the gambler.

Camille having her disguise known, had robbed herself in one of Mabel's dresses, and the two were becoming fast friends.

"Ah me! I would that it was all over," sighed poor Mabel.

"I only hope that Kent Kingdon will not escape."

"If he does?"

"I shall once more go upon his trail," was the determined reply.

"Yes, I will shadow him to the grave," she added, as an angry flash came into her eyes.

For a long time the two, Mabel and Camille, sat discussing the situation, and feeling great suspense as to the result of the fight.

They both knew that the Soldier Detective, with the aid of the deserter ally he had gotten to turn traitor to the outlaws, had arranged to have all of the band of Kent Kingdon at the attack on the train.

They also were aware that Lieutenant Cameron, the Surgeon Scout had said, had ample force to capture the outlaw gang, and were safely ambushed and ready to strike when the Soldier Detective should join them.

The Card King, as a ranchero, had as servants two Chinese, and they had, in the end, proven faithful to Mabel, and it was through one of them that she had been able to send the letter to her father, which had made known to him the true situation of affairs, and had caused the doctor to write to Surgeon Powell asking his aid for his daughter, for Doctor Manners could not leave his wife, who had been prostrated by the blow dealt by the news of Kent Kingdon's infamy.

The night passed away, and Mabel and Camille arose, anxious, and in still greater suspense.

The day was dragging along slowly to them, and they were pale with anxiety to know the result, when a horseman appeared in sight far down the trail.

"Thank Heaven, it is not Kent Kingdon," cried Mabel, as she now saw that the approaching horseman wore a uniform.

"It is my brother, for see, he is an officer, by his shoulder-straps, and who else could it be?" cried Camille.

Far back in the rear was now visible a party of horsemen, and the one in advance seemed to have distanced them.

He came on as rapidly as his tired horse could bear him, and soon after Camille gave a cry of joy.

"It is my brother! but where is our noble friend the Soldier Detective?"

A few moments after and the horseman dashed up to the piazza and threw himself from his horse.

"My sister! Camille, thank God!"

She sprung into his arms and for a minute neither spoke, while Mabel quickly glided away.

Then followed a few words and Carter Cameron told his sister that he knew all, and she was forgiven for all the pain she had caused him by causing herself to be thought dead.

"Come, Mabel, you must know my brother," and at the call Mabel advanced.

He grasped her hand and he saw the question upon her lips ere it was uttered, so said quickly:

"We attacked the Toll-takers, and gained the day; but their chief escaped."

"Escaped?" and the word sprung fairly from the lips of each.

"He escaped from the field; but Surgeon Powell is upon his trail, and he can never escape that man, so have no fear."

"But Kent Kingdon bears a charmed life, Carter."

"I know that he does, Camille; but so does Frank Powell, and no bloodhound on a trail will follow it as that man will."

"You do not know Powell as we at the fort know him."

"Oh, yes, and I have hope that he will capture that man; but I would not so hope were other than he upon his track."

"Well, here comes my escort, and after a rest for the night, we will start for the fort, for the rest of the men went on there from the scene of action."

"And the Surgeon Scout?" asked Camille.

"He will come on to the fort, after he has captured or killed that human fiend," was the reply of the young officer.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SOLDIER DETECTIVE'S REPORT.

THE home of Mabel, the unfortunate wife of Kent Kingdon, was left in the care of good hands, and the young lieutenant started for the fort with his fair companions, accompanied by his soldier escort.

The ride to the fort was made without accident or adventure, and, having already dispatched a courier to the colonel, with a letter explaining all, Carter Cameron knew that a warm welcome would be extended to his sister and to Mabel.

The train, which had been saved by the Surgeon Scout, had already arrived, and the colonel congratulated himself upon the way affairs had turned out.

The fact that Kent Kingdon was the husband of Mabel did not of course reflect upon her, for her sorrows and sufferings were well known and she had the heartfelt sympathy of all at the fort, even before she won their tenderest regard when they beheld her beautiful face.

The story of his sister Carter Cameron determined should remain a secret, and so it was agreed that she should be considered as a former friend of Mabel, and had gone to visit her, when she too had been made to suffer through the villainy of Kent Kingdon.

Most warmly then were Camille and Mabel welcomed by all, from the colonel down to the drummer boy, and yet, amid the scenes that followed shadows would come, when the days passed by and Surgeon Powell did not return.

In spite of his prairie skull and his undaunted courage all knew that he was on the trail of a desperate man, and one who had a record second to no desperado on the border.

Then too, fearing that he might be pursued, Kent Kingdon would be at bay, and it would be so easy for him to lie in ambush and kill his pursuer.

With such thoughts not only the colonel and Lieutenant Cameron were anxious about the Soldier Detective, but also were Camille and Mabel, who well knew just what Kent Kingdon was.

Then, too, the men felt in the same mood, and, as time went by, and the surgeon did not return, Carter Cameron asked to start in search of him with a squad of cavalry.

"The very thing I meant to tell you to do, Cameron," said the colonel, and the order was given, when suddenly the Surgeon Scout was seen approaching.

He rode quietly into the stockade inclosure, raising his hat politely in response to the cheers of the soldiers, and going to the colonel's quarters, made his report.

There at the time were Camille, Mabel and Carter Cameron.

"I have a report to make, colonel," said the Surgeon Scout quietly, after he had been greeted by all present.

Then he went on to tell how he had pursued the Card King, day and night, until he tracked him to the camp of the Sioux chief, who had been his friend, and with him the outlaw had taken refuge.

"You know, colonel, that I once did the old chief a good turn," continued Frank Powell.

"Took him to his village, when I found him with a broken leg, half-dead, in some timber, one day."

"Well, I determined to risk the chief's friendship, and boldly went to the Sioux village and there I found Kent Kingdon."

"I need hardly add that there was trouble between us, and that I shot him."

"Killed him?"

"I aimed for his heart, general," returned the surgeon.

For Frank Powell to say this, meant much.

If he aimed for the heart, it meant that he had found it with his bullet, all knew.

"Thank God!"

The words came from Camille's lips.

Mabel buried her head in silence and walked away, and the subject was dropped between all of them, for they wished it buried.

Some weeks after, Mabel and Camille started for the East, the Beautiful Shadower to become the guest of Miss Manners, for the young widow had taken her own name again.

And Carter Cameron, having obtained a long leave of absence, went with them, while the colonel also made him the bearer of dispatches to the Secretary of War.

The parting with the Surgeon Scout was a sad one, for both Camille and Mabel felt how much they owed to him; but he promised some day to visit them in the East, and thus they hoped they would once more meet the gallant Soldier Detective.

CONCLUSION.

SOME months after the departure of Lieutenant Cameron and his fair companions from the fort, the young officer got his leave of absence extended, and the reason of so doing, his letter to the Surgeon Scout will explain.

"You see, my dear Powell," he wrote, "I am desperately in love."

"I am not the man to tell Mabel Drew that I love her, so soon after the death of her husband, be he what he may; but I am convinced that she was fascinated with him, rather than loved him; and more—I feel assured that I can win her heart."

"She is all that is lovely, all that is true, and I am determined she shall one day be my wife."

"I find that the pecuniary interests of my sister and myself also demand care that I cannot give them on the frontier, for investments are panning out splendidly for us."

"I have been urged by General Custer, who is my friend, to get my leave extended for a couple of months, and then to apply for orders to be stationed here."

"He will help me, so that it can be done, and hence it is I shall expect to remain East."

"I will have to give you up, but our friendship will ever remain for you the same."

"Your name is daily spoken by us all, and you shall have a hearty welcome when you visit us, which I hope will be soon."

"If I get orders to remain here, I shall purchase a home, and Camille will keep it for me, until Mabel takes her place as my wife, though sister will never leave us, and she vows that she will never marry."

"I will write to you fully of my plans."

Such was the letter from Carter Cameron, and in answer he received the following from the Surgeon Scout:

"MY DEAR CAMERON:—

"I am more than happy to learn how affairs are with you, and the colonel will write asking that you be ordered to remain in St. Louis, and there I hope to see you all, some day."

"Now let me tell you some news."

"A band of Sioux chiefs came here last week pleading for peace, and among them I saw a man whom I was positive had a white skin beneath his paint."

"I watched him, and at last I decided to act, so sprung upon him, and made him prisoner, for I took him wholly by surprise."

"I found, when his paint was washed off that he was in truth Kent Kingdon, the Gambler King."

"A number of the soldiers, and several old miners, who were at the fort, recognized him at once."

"Then he admitted that he had been badly wounded by my bullet, but recovering, had vowed to kill me, and casting his lot with the red-skins, he had been made a chief, and had come to the fort to take my life."

"Perhaps it was his hateful look at me that caused me to read him."

"Well, his charmed life was broken, for the colonel quickly gave orders for his execution, and Kent Kingdon was hanged for his numerous crimes."

"I can now vouch for it that he is dead and buried, and thus ends the story of my work in tracking down this man."

This letter was read to Camille, by Carter, but not to Mabel, for he did not wish to reopen old wounds in her heart.

The young officer was successful in receiving his orders to remain in St. Louis, and, one year after, he led to the altar Mabel, the widow of Kent Kingdon the Card King, and Frank Powell, the Soldier Detective, was at the wedding, as best man, the bridesmaid being Camille, The Beautiful Shadower.

THE END.

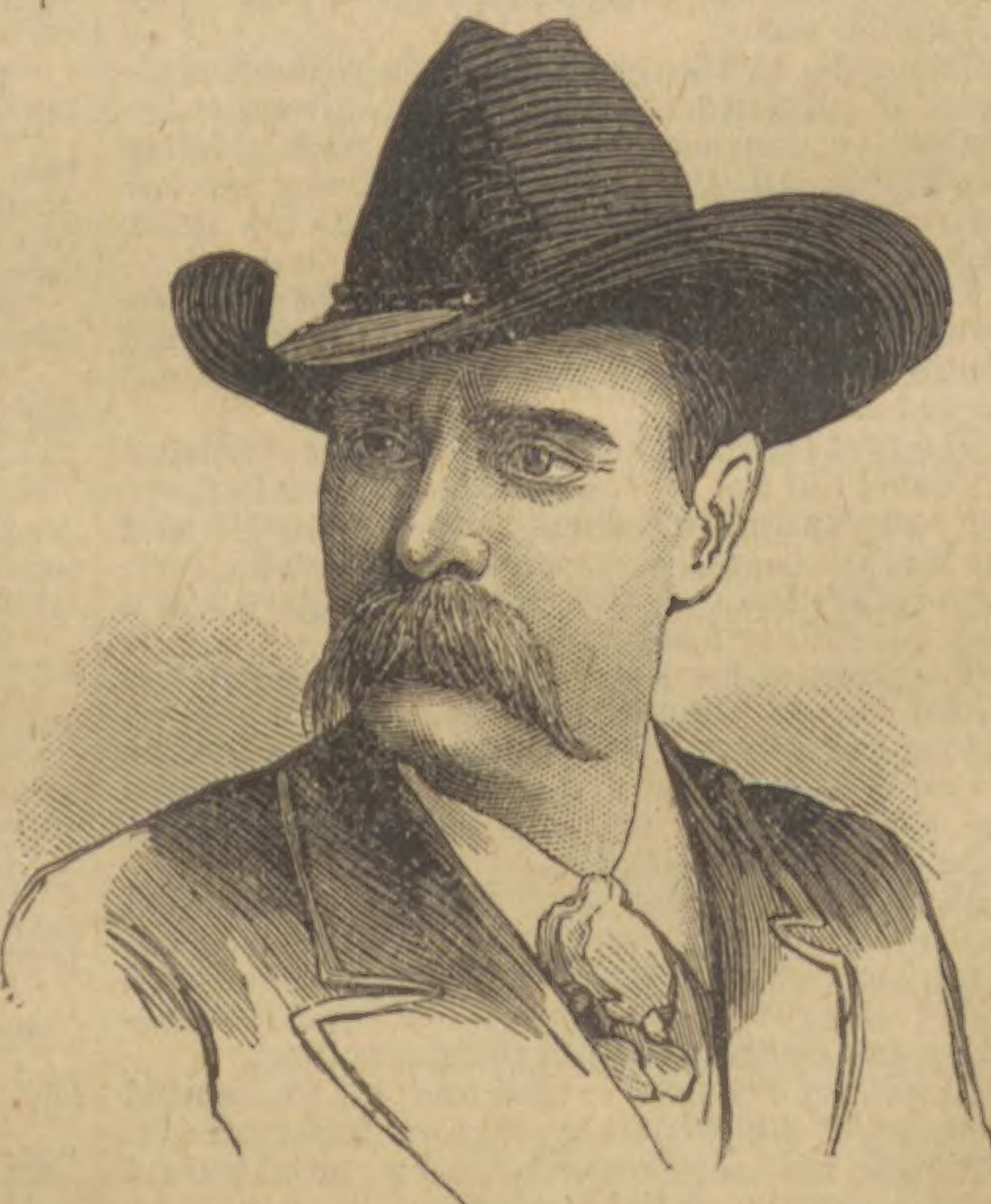
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